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29Z





"Come as far as the gate."

CLIMBING THE HILL.

A Story for the Household.

Fales

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM."

With a Frontispiece by Dalziel.



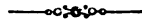
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— end —

CLIMBING THE HILL.



CHAPTER I.

THE OLD HOME.

“COME as far as the gate, it is such a lovely night.”

It was enough to tempt any one out, that still, sweet, summer evening, after the great heat of the day. The round, red, harvest moon had sailed up grandly into the sky, and was shedding floods of soft light on the landscape, till bough, and leaf, and blossom, stood out clear and distinct like a beautiful photograph. It was quite still; there was no sound, save the chirruping of the grasshoppers, and occasionally a burst of song from the nightingale, who, with breast “up till a thorn,” filled the air with matchless melody. Any one might have been tempted out, for the beauty of the night alone,

without the invitation uttered in such pleading tones, "Come as far as the gate." But I must own it *was* the invitation in this peculiar instance which lured Lillian Leigh to the gate of the pretty place which had been her home for twenty years, but which, after this night, was to be home no longer. The morning was to make Lillian a bride; and as she stood there "under the silver moon," with him beside her to whom she was so shortly to plight her troth, mingled feelings of joy and sorrow were in her heart; he seemed to read her thoughts, for he bent his head to look down in the quiet, serious face, and soft eyes, in which he thought he saw tears trembling, and said—

"My own Lillian, you are not dreading your new life, are you?"

The clouds vanished in a moment, and with a bright smile she lifted her face to his, and said, earnestly—

"No, *indeed* not; how could I, when it is to be passed with you."

"Darling! I know you believe I shall try to make you happy; but you looked just then a little sad, I thought."

"In every earthly happiness there is some alloy, you know; leaving the old home had more to do

with my serious face than thoughts of the new one."

"Yes, I suppose that is a trial to a girl; men are turned so early out of the nest, so soon make a home and ties for themselves, that they do not feel it in the same manner. I have not seen my dear old mother for more than two years."

"Oh, Leonard, how dreadful! I shall see mine oftener than that, shan't I, dear?"

"Well, I've not quite made up my mind as to whether I shan't shut you up, and allow none of your relatives to come near you."

"Make your mind up to-night, then," she said, laughing, "and give me the result before you go, that I may have time to change mine."

"No, no, I must be more cunning than that—secure you first, and then bully you."

"Lilly, Lilly," called a voice from the house.

"Coming, mother. I must go, dearest; God bless you."

"God bless you! To-morrow at eleven."

Lillian ran quickly up the garden and into the house; but Leonard Gray stood where she had left him, watching her retreating figure until the house-door was shut, and not one more glimpse of her could he gain, and then murmuring, "God help me

to make her happy," he walked slowly and thoughtfully home to his lodgings.

Lillian's early life had been passed, as I have said, in this little home, which, though only an omnibus journey from London, was as pretty and countrified a place as a lover of rusticity might wish for. It had once been a farmhouse—a real old-fashioned farmhouse—with its large kitchen and huge chimney, up which many a ham and hock of bacon had hung to dry; low pitched ceilings, with oaken beams across; large cupboards in all the rooms, and doors and skirting of oak, black with age; unexpected little steps tripped you up at the entrance of most of the rooms; and casement windows, with their diamond panes, and deep window-seats, spoke of bygone days, making one fancy that out of them might have peeped many a pretty face with mob cap and clubbed hair, and many little feet in high-heeled shoes walked down the pleached alley of the old-fashioned garden—such a garden too! Such fruit-trees; such a lawn, with a splendid cedar raising its stately head up to the very chimney tops.

Some former owner with no antiquarian tastes, not content with the "best parlour," had required the drawing-room of modern days; so that jutting

out at one end was a large room with French windows, opening on to a rich lawn, on which, bent with age, was a mulberry-tree; over this room was a bedroom, also of modern construction, kept by the present occupiers as the "spare room"—Mr. and Mrs. Leigh preferring to sleep in the warm panelled room in the old part of the house.

Mr. Leigh, though a city merchant, could not bear a residence there, so as soon as he could, he had sought for a house out of London, and yet sufficiently near to allow of his daily attendance at his business. An advertisement drew his attention to his present residence, and finding it was to be sold very cheaply, he purchased it, and moved at once with his wife, his son, and his six-weeks-old little daughter, the Lillian of our tale, to Old Court, as the place was called.

Leonard Gray was the son of an old friend of Mr. Leigh's, working diligently as an architect; out of civility to his friend he had asked the young man frequently to his house, and most Sundays were happily passed at Old Court by Leonard Gray, until at length he found that somehow or other a pair of dark blue eyes, with long black lashes came between him and his work, and mingled with his dreams, and that a bright merry voice rang in his ears and

haunted him day and night to the exclusion of every other thought; so after several hours' serious consideration and grave consultation with a bosom friend, he went down to Old Court to ask Lillian Leigh to be his wife. She was no foolish, affected young lady to say "no" when she meant "yes," or feign indifference to conceal love; so she answered him in the straightforward honest way in which he asked, and easily gaining the consent of the parents on both sides, the young couple were engaged. They were among the bright exceptions which make the rule that the course of true love never did run smooth. Theirs was very true love, but no storms disturbed its peaceful current; and, as I have said, the morrow was to see them begin their wedded course, and time was then to prove if love begun in so serene a sky, would last through rougher weather and endure through darker days.

"I called you in, dear," said her mother, "because papa wants to have prayers at once, and send the household early to bed, as we shall all have to be astir soon in the morning."

"Yes, mother, dear; shall I get the book and ring?"

"If you please, love. Helen and Emily are gone to bed, are they not?" said Mrs. Leigh.

"No, I think not; here they are," answered Lillian, as with their arms round each other's waists, two pretty young things, about fifteen, came into the room, both so exactly alike that there was no doubt of their being twins.

"Where have you been, children?"

"Only seeing how Bridget was getting on, papa."

"Oh! there is a good smell of cooking in the kitchen."

"Yes; Bridget is as pleased and excited as though she was going to be married herself."

"Much more so, I should say," answered Mr. Leigh, laughing. "I think with Bridget's peculiar notions, she would be as cross as possible if she were compelled to be married; for she certainly never would do it without compulsion. Poor old body, we must excuse her from prayers to-night, I suppose."

"Yes, I presume so. Ring, Lillian, the others can come, of course."

The housemaid and boy, comprising the whole of the modest establishment kept by the Leighs, save the redoubtable Bridget, entered, and the quiet little service commenced. Happy as she really was, still Lilly could not help the tears which

dropped on her clasped hands as she remembered that it was the last evening she should kneel in her own home as Lillian Leigh. The "last time" has always a tone of sadness about it; and, however happy the prospects of the future, however bright the home we are going to, there must be a sigh over that "last time." There can only be one consolation, which those who are blessed with that happy gift, "finding a bright side" to everything, may no doubt discover and avail themselves of—who shall say it is the "last"? So out of our own power is the ordering of the smallest event, that never can we say with certainty for the "last time," as a sweet poetess sings—

"Say thou not sadly 'never,' and 'no more,'
But from thy lips banish those falsest words;
While life remains, that which was thine before,
Again may be thine."

Some such thoughts, perhaps, dried Lilly's tears, for she was a bright, cheerful-hearted little being; looking forward into the future gaily and happily, and indulging in no morbid or unnecessarily sad anticipations; so that when her father called her back as she was following her sisters to bed, she could show him a smiling face, which satisfied him that his darling (for it must be owned that Lillian

was his darling) was happy and satisfied in the prospect of her new life.

"I called you back, love," he said, "to give you my little present. You have had many contributions to your new home. I think I had better give you this;" and he placed in her hands a purse. "It contains," he continued, "fifty pounds. I have no fortune to give you with your husband; but you shall not go penniless to him. This has been saved for some years, little by little, for the first bride in my family, and it will enable you, with the wardrobe your mother has found you, not to bother your husband with your own private expenses for some time."

"Oh, thank you, dear, dear papa, so much; why, I was never so rich in my whole life."

"I dare say not, little woman. May God bless you in your new home, and teach you to order your house aright. Learn to be frugal without meanness; liberal without extravagance; religious without cant. Keep your house cheerful, yourself bright and neat, your meals regular and well-served, so that there shall be no other home more attractive to your husband than his own. In short, Lillian, be like your mother, and your husband will have nothing else to desire." And as he spoke he laid

his hand tenderly on the head of his wife, who was seated beside him, on the thin, white hair, which he could recollect so thick, and brown, and glossy; and as she took his hand and pressed it in acknowledgment, he raised it to his lips, and kissing it fondly, said, "Ah, Lillian, this little hand when first I knew it, was fair, and white, and dimpled like your own; this dear, thin, pale cheek, like a blush rose in its summer beauty; but God knows, and she believes it, they are dearer a thousand fold to me now than in all their first loveliness; may your husband, if your lives are both spared as long, say the same of you, my child."

Lillian could not answer, but she kissed them both, and then hurried out of the room. As she went upstairs she heard voices in the spare room, and looking in, she found her twin sisters there, attracted by the wedding finery, which lay there all spread out on the bed ready for the morning.

"We wanted one more peep, Lillian," said Helen; "how lovely you will look, darling; I long to see you; and what heaps of presents," she continued, turning to the table on which they were all laid. "Oh, dear! it must be very nice to be married."

Lillian laughed, and kissed her as she answered,

"I have no doubt your turn will come in time; now come to bed, and I will show you what papa gave me."

The girls slept in a large, old-fashioned room with two beds in it with canopied tops, the twins shared one and Lillian the other; each girl had her own chest of drawers and dressing-table, and their hanging book-shelves; two little couches, with pretty chintz covers, were on either side the large bay window; and three birds in cages, hung from hooks in the ceiling, special pets of the girls: the room, in short, was their "sanctum," where they worked, and chatted, and read, and did as they liked. They had never had a resident governess or been to school; Mrs. Leigh had taught them herself when they were very young, and since they had been daily to a lady in the neighbourhood—a widow, who had one little girl, and whom she was glad to have companions for. She was very clever, an excellent musician and linguist, and a perfect lady, so that the girls could not have had a better instructress. The twins still went to her, but Lillian had given up study for more than a twelvemonth. A brother, older than Lillian, was in business in the City, and one between Lillian and the twins was a midshipman, and at the present time in the China

seas. The elder brother had been married about a year, and was of course expected in the morning with his wife, and a small, but very precious little person, whom mamma could not be induced to leave at home, even for a few hours, not that they wished she should, for the first grandchild was highly esteemed by all the family.

The morning dawned bright and beautiful, and all in the house were early awake and up. Lillian had some breakfast sent to her room, and tried to keep herself quiet and composed until it was time to dress—this ceremonial Bridget intended superintending herself, and having completed all culinary occupations the day before, she came up dressed in her best Sunday gown, white muslin apron, and cap enveloped in white ribands, to Lillian's room, accompanied by Anne, the housemaid, whom she was going graciously to permit to do what she could not—namely, the bride's hair—"hair-dressing, she knowed nothing about," she owned, "but put the dear child's wedding gown on she would; had not she been the first to take her in her arms when she was borned? then who so fit as she to dress her for her bridal?"

Very lovely Lillian looked, as Helen predicted, and very wisely and well she behaved—no cryings

and sobbings marred the beauty of her sweet, innocent face ; and when on her return from church, she was praised for not crying, she asked, " Why should I ? What have I to cry for ? I am Leonard's wife ; what more on earth can I desire ? "

Ah ! if every bride who stands before God's altar, could make such an answer, very little work would be left for the Divorce Court.

Then the carriage came to the door to take her away, and the last " good-bye " had to be said ; a few tears glistened in her eyes, it is true, but they were chased by the merriest laugh which rang gladly in her mother's ear, as the old shoe, thrown by her brother Harry, flew over the carriage ; and the last they saw of Lillian was a face all radiant with smiles, and a little hand in a well-fitting lavender glove, waving a handkerchief to the wedding party, who stood watching them out of sight.

The Isle of Wight was fixed on to spend the honeymoon ; and amongst its lovely scenery the young couple wandered during the fortnight's holiday the bridegroom allowed himself ; and at the end of that time Lillian took possession of her new home.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW HOME.

It was a strange feeling to Lillian, the entering the little house of which she was to be sole mistress; taking possession of the keys, and giving the orders to the one servant, which their prudence only allowed them to keep.

They reached home about six o'clock, and, being tired, preferred tea to dinner; and it was rather a puzzler to poor little Lillian to be asked in the most hopeless voice by the servant—by its very tone implying she had not the slightest idea herself—how much milk she should take for tea? but Lillian felt it would never do to appear ignorant, and so, with a desperate plunge, she said, “A pint”—without the faintest idea whether it would be much or little. They had always kept a cow at home, as long as she could remember, so that the exact amount consumed at any meal she had not an idea of, and

this one question she had never thought to ask her mother, though for months previous to her marriage she had been most assiduous in getting domestic hints from Mrs. Leigh. However, as her husband was very fond of tea, and liked plenty of milk in each cup, and the maid had also to be considered, there was not much more than was necessary; and being very bright, and thoughtful, and anxious to learn, Lilly took particular notice how much was left, and soon decided that a pint and a half each day for breakfast, tea, and cooking purposes, would be the right quantity. They drank coffee for breakfast, and liked a great deal of hot milk with it, which had, of course, to be considered.

The house Leonard had taken for his young wife was in a pleasant suburb of London, within an easy drive of the country. He did not like to take her quite into London, so that it took him about half an hour to reach his office by omnibus, and something under the hour walking; on fine mornings, and when not pressed for time, he preferred walking, so that the breakfast hour was perforce an early one; but Lillian liked that: she could then have plenty of time to assist the servant, and do all those sort of things which she could not expect to have well done by a maid-of-all-work. The drawing-room was her

special charge; she dusted all the ornaments and books, and arranged the flowers for it, which her small but neatly-kept garden provided her with; her husband's dressing-room and her own dressing-table were also her care; and the making of the pastry, cakes, and little made dishes, which to her husband's delight and astonishment were always provided for him. She had made herself two coarse aprons with bibs, which covered her dress completely, and with her sleeves rolled up to her elbow, and the skirt of her dress looped up, showing her scarlet petticoat, and her neat little foot and ankle, she would come laughing to her husband, holding his hat, nicely brushed, his stick and gloves ready for him to take, and bidding him kiss his housemaid before he went, stand on tip-toe (for she was but a little thing, and he a great tall fellow, more than six foot high), and receive the kiss he was ever ready to give, and which he felt was richly merited by the little being who made him such a happy home. Then when she had watched him out of sight and kissed her hand to him for the last time, she would go to her little kitchen and inspect the larder, and settle the dinner (to the amazement of the small red-haired maid who could not imagine where dinner was to be found out of a third day's leg of mutton,

sending away the butcher with "nothing wanted"). Nothing wanted, of course not; had not they had a goose for dinner the day before?

"Oh, yes; but a gentleman came to dinner, and master had the legs as was left broiled for breakfast, and there was only the back and stuffing."

"Rachel," says Lillian, smiling, "a goose has giblets, and I will show you how to make giblet soup; and will not that do for to-day? The cold mutton will do for your dinner, with a bread pudding, and the soup and what I shall scrape off the mutton after you have dined, will make a delightful dinner for us."

"Cold mutton for you, ma'am?"

"Oh, dear no! I shall mince the meat up very fine, and put some mashed potatoes over the top, and brown it, so that we shall have a delightful little dinner. Now be quick; you have the pieces of bread to put to soak, and some potatoes to peel and wash. Do that while I am seeing to the drawing-room, and then I shall be able to help you make the beds;" and away went the little happy woman singing some merry air, making the heavy stupid girl more inclined to work cheerfully from her own bright example.

Leonard would get home about six, and there ready to welcome him was Lillian, dressed simply but tastefully, as though no coarse apron had ever covered her gown, or duster ever been held in her delicate little hand. What delight it was to him to be so welcomed. What a contrast from the lodgings he had lived in so long; and how she laughed, thinking of the happy difference now, as he recounted the discomforts he had then had to encounter—the smoky fire which the dirty maid had forgot to light till just as he was coming in, on a bitter winter night; and how he always found on a hot night there was a blazing fire half way up the chimney; the greasy mutton chop and half-cold underdone potato that generally formed his dinner; and the difficulty in keeping anything which was not dipped into by mistress and maid. Tea and sugar, wine, spirits, potted meat, preserves, everything alike diminished rapidly. Then his description of the servants caused Lillian immense amusement. He had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and told a story with admirable point; and as he sat beside her at the open window, looking into the pretty little garden, after having thoroughly enjoyed the dinner she had arranged for him, and recounted two or three stories of the lodging-house servants, Lillian

declared he was making them up out of his own head ; they never could be true.

One in particular of a girl, who, when he rang for "lights," asked if he would have them "hot or cold."

"Oh ! Leonard, dear, what did she mean ?"

"Well, I suppose she thought I had invited the cats of the neighbourhood to a feast, for when I said, 'Well, hot ; I should think if you put your finger in them you would find them so,' she said, 'Oh, you mean candles,' as though it was quite a new idea to her. The delightful refreshment sold on little sticks to the canine inhabitants being evidently the only idea she had of 'lights.'"

"Dear Leonard, it is too ridiculous," said Lilly, laughing heartily ; "but the stupidity of some servants is rather astounding. I am terribly afraid Rachel will give me rather a difficult task."

"Is she stupid ?"

"Decidedly not bright ; but I want to try to keep, and teach her if I can, because we only perpetuate stupidity by sending them into other families, without one effort to brighten them up and waken their intellects. I think it is often because they have never used their wits that they appear to have got none."

"Yes; but my little darling, you must not be plagued with her. I am only grieved that you do not have two servants. It is not my will you should soil those pretty fingers with anything."

"No more I do, sir," said Lillian, playfully. "I'm very choice over them, I assure you; but I like having only one servant; it's one plague instead of two, you will admit, and bustling about a little amuses me. What should I do all day when you are out?"

"Ah! you are good enough to say that, my little pet; but the cheeks must keep their roses and the eyes their brightness, all undiminished, or I have two good servants at once, and forbid you to do a thing."

"I am sure then my roses would go; idleness would never suit me. Do you know, though, I have got one favour to ask you, I would rather have 'something' than two servants."

"And what may that 'something' be, pet, eh?"

"Well, dear, a piano. I have been longing for one ever since I have been married, and that idea we talked of about the three years' system would be so nice, I think."

"I will see about it when I go to town to-morrow, then, love."

"Thank you, Leonard dear; it seems to me that when papa spent so much money on my singing, it would be a pity to go and forget it all; and I mean to make you practise every evening, because you have a lovely voice, and I shall teach you lots of duets."

Leonard kissed the little bright face uplifted to his as he answered, "Anything to amuse you, dear, and repay you in some measure for the happy home your love has given me."

And so the next morning, Lillian's last words as she saw Leonard off to his office were. "Don't forget to see about the piano;" and she went about her household duties happier with the thought that she should make the evenings bright and cheerful to her husband by the exercise of that talent it had caused much trouble and expense to acquire, and which she justly felt it would be wrong now to neglect. She remembered how her mother's sweet voice had charmed them all at home; and many an evening her brother Harry, who was passionately fond of music, had said, "I would stay at home any night, from any amusement, to hear my mother sing. I don't believe she's to be matched anywhere." And

how Mrs. Leigh had then impressed on her the necessity, indeed the sacred duty, which devolved on all women, wives, sisters, and mothers, to make home cheerful and amusing to the husbands and brothers.

“How many heart-broken wives,” she would say, “and disgraced parents, might be spared, if this duty was diligently impressed on them, if they were taught that glad bright pleasant evenings would ensure the society of their husbands and brothers, and make them feel the truth of the old song, ‘There’s no place like home.’”

Lillian had stored this in her mind, with many other of her mother’s excellent precepts; and so she had determined that, whatever cares harassed her through the day, she would be careful to keep herself bright and cheerful for the evening. The piano had been such a resource at home, that she was rather at a loss to know what amusement she should find for her husband; but his newspaper and cigar, with which he always regaled himself in their little garden after dinner, and her own merry chatter, had answered very well up till the present time; but as the days began to draw in, and the cool autumn evenings to steal upon them, she

thought a piano would be such delight, so that with real joy she anticipated seeing it arrive.

Busying herself about her little house, and trying to put some sense into her maid, she forgot for the time all about it, until the sound of wheels, followed by a knock, attracted her attention; and looking out, there, before the gate, was a van evidently containing a piano. Was it possible? it could not be for her. Leonard could scarcely have got into town, much less have had time to go to the music shop. However, before she could cease wondering, Rachel entered with a note, which Lillian, eagerly opening, read as follows:—

“THE DOVECOTE, HOENDEAN, HAMPSHIRE,

“September 4.

“MY DEAR LILLIAN,—I think that is your name, but I have never seen you since you were born, because I’m a queer old woman and live in a queer out-of-the-way old place in England, from which I never go away; but I knew and loved your mother when she was a child, and have watched her since in my queer way. The last time I heard from her, she said you were going to be married. I looked in the paper and saw it announced, and I hope and pray you will be as good a wife and mother as she

has been. I wanted to give you a marriage present for her sake, and I asked if you had got a piano, for I should hope you have profited enough by her good advice, not to give up all your grace and accomplishments now you are married. She said you had not yet bought an instrument, and she thought you would scarcely like to do so the first year; so, my dear, herewith I send you one, with an old woman's love and blessing; if you neither sing nor play yourself, cultivate friends who do, because home must be made cheerful and agreeable, though I know that your mother has taught you this more by example than precept. Once more, God bless you! your true, though unknown friend,

“AGATHA HEPBURN.”

As Lillian concluded this strange epistle, Rachel came in to ask if the men should bring in the “Peeaner,” still wondering and yet delighted, Lilly said “decidedly,” and watched with even childish eagerness and pleasure the taking of the elegant walnut-wood instrument from the van, and the placing of it in the drawing-room; then when the men were gone, and she opened and tried it, and the sweet tones of one of Erard's best rang through the room, her pleasure can be imagined by

real lovers of music, by those who believe in its power to charm, and often drive away the evil spirits of fretfulness and discontent, which will sometimes come to mar the harmony of even the happiest home.

But whilst Lillian's fingers ran over the keys, and she sang a few bars of one of her favourite ballads, making Rachel stand open-mouthed in the kitchen to listen to sweeter strains than she had ever heard before, it suddenly occurred to her that Leonard would order her a piano in town. What had she better do? Why, go at once to his office, and tell him the news of the beautiful present. She had never been alone into town, and she half feared Leonard would not like it; but it was important to stop his getting the piano, and so she thought she would risk it. Telling Rachel, therefore, where she was going, and repeating her directions as to the dinner, she dressed herself neatly and plainly, as befitted a passenger by omnibus, and took her way to the City.

In a narrow, dark street stood Leonard's chambers, and into his small private room Lilly was shown at once, greatly to Leonard's astonishment, who eagerly exclaimed—

“My dear girl, what is the matter?”

"Nothing in the world the matter, only I wanted to see you," answered Lillian, laughing. And then she at once recounted the tale of the piano. "You are not angry that I came alone, are you, dear?" she asked.

"Angry! not in the least; but I do not wish you to come alone often. It's a nasty, bustling place for you."

"I know, dear; but I think it is just as well to get over that nervous feeling which only grows on one, so that we cannot move about alone when it is necessary. Helpless women are such a bore."

"So they are," he answered; "but very independent women are not loveable; and, besides, it a little lets you down, you know, to be travelling about in omnibuses, and bustling through the City alone."

"Oh, yes, I would not do it without a necessity," said Lillian; "but I did think it would be such a shame and inconvenience too, for you to order the piano, and then find one at home."

"Exactly, dear, you were quite right, as you always are; but now you had better remain in town, and go home with me. Will you go to Harry's?"

"Yes, I should like that immensely."

"Then I will take you, if you will wait a minute."

He soon returned, and they went to Harry Leigh's together. Harry Leigh resided with his wife, at the private house adjoining his offices—one of the large old-fashioned City houses, with wide staircases, up which a coach and horses might travel, gloomy and dark enough, but still warm and comfortable. The drawing-room was very handsome, with fresco paintings on the ceiling, and handsomely-carved oak panelling on the walls, and being well and tastefully furnished (for Harry was doing well), it assumed a more cheerful appearance than the rest of the house, though Lilly could never get over the darkness and the feeling that the opposite houses were walking in at the windows.

As they walked along together, Leonard told her he had had an invitation to dine from a Mr. Broughton, a rich client of his, for whom he had been building some houses.

"He wants you to come, too. He's a bachelor, with a beautiful house at Blackheath."

"To dine, dear? How are we to get there?"

"Well, train, I suppose."

"What! Dressed for dinner? Impossible!"

dear, I could not. Oh, I know, Leonard, I'll treat myself to a fly out of my *own* money."

"No, poor little woman, that is a shame."

"Not a bit ; I should like it."

"May I ride in it too, then, or shall I go by the train ?"

"Goose, go with me, of course. I must own I do like to go out comfortably, or not at all. It is the first invitation we have accepted, and so we can afford a little extravagance. We shall not do it often."

"Very well, then ; don't let us forget Tuesday, at half-past six."

Mrs. Harry Leigh was at home, and in a little room opening into the drawing-room, which she used as her own private sitting-room, where baby's bassinette, all muslin and pink ribands was always to be seen, Lillian found her. She was a rather pretty interesting-looking woman, but one with whom Lillian could never become very intimate or feel much attachment for. She gave you the impression that she thought that there were only two people in the world—herself and her baby ; and the only time when a smile of satisfaction rested on her lips was when anyone admired the said baby. Luckily Lillian was very fond of children,

and very fond of her brother, so his baby claimed her special attention, and therefore the smile was often accorded to her.

"I may leave Lilly to lunch, and call for her, Ada, may I not?" asked Leonard, whilst Lillian, on her knees beside the cot, was admiring the baby.

"Oh, yes, certainly, Leonard, if Lilly can eat cold boiled beef. I fear we have nothing more tempting to offer her."

"I have bread and cheese at home, Ada," said Lilly, smiling. "I don't allow myself meat twice a day, so I shall look on your cold beef in the light of a luxury. Leonard must tell you what brought me to the City to-day."

"You must tell her yourself, my little woman, for I must be off."

So when Leonard was gone, the whole story of the piano was recounted; but the baby had to be taken up in the middle, and though Ada said, "Well, yes, go on," Lillian could see she was not attending, till, provoked that her tale was not listened to, she said at last—

"Don't you keep a nurse, Ada?"

"Oh, yes; but I never let her have baby when I can help it—only just when I am obliged to be

out, or at dinner. I like better seeing to it myself."

"I suppose you understand babies thoroughly, then?"

"Oh! I don't know about understanding them. I don't think there's anything to understand; but it is an amusement to me in this dull house. I see nothing of Harry until dinner-time, and it would fidget me to hear it crying, so I have it always; but go on about the piano. Did you find out at the end who this good old body was?"

"Well, she signed herself 'Agatha Hepburn.' I have heard mamma speak of her as an old friend, but I never saw her in my life."

"She has made herself known to you in a most agreeable way, I'm sure; for a piano is a piece of furniture, if it's nothing more. I never use mine. I've no time to sing now."

"Not to Harry of an evening? He used to be so fond of music at home."

"Oh, he asks me to sing sometimes; but I've always such a heap of work to do for baby, and I never cared much about singing."

"That is a pity. I always thought you sang so nicely, and I know Harry did," said Lillian.

"Ah, that was in our courting days. Married ones are very different, you will find."

"Are they different, then, because happier? I am much happier than I was then. It is so lovely to feel Leonard is my very, very own now, and no one can take him from me. It seems so much more peaceful a life—nothing to dread and fidget about, no 'good-byes.' Oh, I used to hate that 'good-bye,' even when he was coming again next day."

"I know you were a very love-sick maiden; but I do not think I ever was. I always hated 'spooning,' and Harry and I are a very common-place couple, not at all a pair of turtle-doves. I daresay, by the by, you would like to see him. I'll send down and say you are here, and perhaps he'll come up to luncheon. He does not often honour me at that meal; but your being here might make a difference."

Accordingly a message was sent to him, and an answer returned that master hoped Mrs. Gray was going to stay to luncheon, as he would come up then, but he could not before.

Nursing the baby and talking to Ada filled the time until luncheon, and Harry arrived. He was delighted to see her. He said it was quite a treat

to see her sunny face in the dingy old City ; it quite brightened the place up.

"He never says such civil things to me, Lillian," said Ada.

"Because I seldom see your face ; it's always buried in baby's cot, or else in her fat neck. What do you think of the little mortal, Lill ? It grows, doesn't it ?"

"Beautifully : it's a darling."

"What fun it will be to see you with one, Lilly!"

"Don't, Harry, be such a goose," answered Lilly.

"Well, it will be fun. You'll be just like a child with a big doll. I can so well remember you parading the nursery with your doll, wrapped up in a shawl, with such little, grave, womanly airs, assuring me it was "fretty with its teeth," that when I see you with a baby, I shall recall those days, and, mistaking it for the poor old doll, stick the poor little animal on the top of the door, out of your reach, as I used to do, that. How angry you were, to be sure !"

"Yes, I can remember it well," said Lillian ; "and, do you know, even now I could not bear the doll to be ill-used or knocked about. I never would let Helen and Emily have it. It's carefully

wrapped up in paper, in a box in mamma's room now."

"I never cared about a doll in my life," said Ada.

"No; and yet she makes the most wonderful fuss about this baby," said Harry; "she has neither thought nor care for any other earthly thing. I'm nobody."

"Don't be so foolish, Harry, but eat your lunch. You don't want to be washed and fed, and the baby does."

"Ah! it's all very fine, but it's true, nevertheless, Lilly. How did you come, by the by, and how are you going back again?"

"I came alone; but I am going home with Leonard; he is going to call for me, if Ada will let me stay here till then."

"I think it is probable she may. But I must run off; I'm up to my eyes in business. Good-bye, Lilly darling. We are going to dine at Old Court on Sunday—are you?"

"We have not heard about it yet; but I do not think we could. Leonard likes his uncle always to dine with us on Sunday."

"Ah! then, that is why you're not asked; they know that, I daresay. Well, once more, good-bye;

come and see us again soon. It's so jolly catching such a peep of you." And giving her a hearty kiss, away he ran.

Leonard called for her about half-past five, and they went home together, Lillian thinking it must be much nicer to love one's husband as she loved hers, than in Ada's cool, matter-of-fact way; and that if she did have a baby, much as she should love it, she was sure she never would put it the least in comparison with "darling Leonard."

She felt a little anxious to get home, this being the first time she had left Rachel to manage for herself; and so, of course, the omnibus stopped incessantly. The last stoppage was to take in a melancholy-looking, thin man, whom her husband, to her surprise, spoke to. When they got out, she asked who it was, as something in the man's appearance interested her.

"Why, he is a messenger at the office, and lives somewhere close to us—Walworth Road, I believe. I should not think he often treats himself to a ride, poor thing."

"He does look poor and wretched indeed."

"I suspect he is very poor, too. I often give him an extra sixpence for any job he does for me."

"Poor fellow! Is he married?"

"Oh! yes, and has children—a whole heap, I daresay, as he can ill afford to keep them."

"Do find out where he lives, and if it is not far off, I should like to go and see his wife, and find out if I can help them."

"Very well, little Samaritan, I will," said Leonard, laughing.

"Well, dear, I think we ought to do something for the poor; and it always seems to me that it is more fair to let it be those whom we employ, if they stand in need of help!"

"Quite right, Lillian. If all did that, there would be very little actual distress left. Here we are at home. How snug it looks!"

"Yes; and I hope the dinner's all right. I am too late to see to it," said Lilly. But she went first to the kitchen, to inquire of Rachel how she had managed, and she assured her that she had got on "first rate."

Smiling at this assertion, and trusting it would be proved by the results, Lilly sat down to dinner. The meat was certainly roasted very well; but when the scalloped oysters, which were to follow, and which she knew was a favourite dish of her husband's, came on table, Lilly's astonishment and vexation can be better imagined than described,

when she found them covered with grated cheese ! The bell was rung quickly, and Rachel, answering the summons, was questioned as to where she learnt this novel dish.

“ Why, ma’am, you did it yourself last time we had oysters.”

“ But we never have had oysters before, Rachel, since we’ve been here ; they are only just in.”

“ They wasn’t the same sort of oysters ; but they was done like this, with butter and cheese grated over, and set down afore the fire.”

“ Oh, child, you are thinking of maccaroni,” said Lillian, hardly able to help laughing, vexed as she was ; whilst Leonard laughed outright as the girl answered—

“ Oh, laws ! yes, the long curly stuff, so it was.”

“ Well take this away, we cannot eat it ; you have quite spoilt it. Dear Leonard, I am so sorry.”

“ Never mind, my dear girl, I have done excellently well, and a pipe at the open window in the drawing-room, whilst you play to me on your new piano, will be a greater treat to me than scalloped oysters. We will just have some cheese without oysters, if Rachel will allow us, and then to the piano.”

They had determined never to indulge themselves in wine after dinner, excepting on Sundays or when friends were with them, and they diligently as yet had kept their resolution. They moved directly after dinner into the drawing-room, and Leonard's pipe was more agreeable to him than any wine, and they soon began to feel dessert a most unnecessary thing, and gave it up altogether.

The piano was a source of universal pleasure. Leonard had a nice voice and good ear, though without any knowledge of music, and Lillian soon taught him some duets, which he sang admirably. The only mischief it caused was the hindrance it was to Rachel, who would stand at the kitchen door, leaving plates, dishes, and saucepans to wash themselves, to listen to the sounds, which she declared "reminded her of the hangels." Where she had been so blessed as to be permitted to hear them, she did not say.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

LILLIAN had written to Agatha Hepburn to thank her for her handsome present, and say what pleasure it had brought her, after first communicating with her mother to know whether she was to address her as Miss or Mrs. Hepburn, and in reply, Mrs. Leigh had told her that though she had never been married she was always called in the village where she lived, Mrs. Hepburn. "Hers is a strange history," Mrs. Leigh had added; "I will tell it you some day." These few words caused Lilly some curiosity; why had she never been told before? She had heard her mother speak of such a person, but that was all, and never knew that there was any "history" attached to her. She quite looked forward to a long day at home, in hopes that she could then persuade her mother to tell her all about it.

Lillian and Leonard had been married about six weeks now, and had received several visits from his

business friends, which Lillian had in due form returned, but she was not much captivated with any of them; and as she and Leonard had determined to give no parties, their house as well as their means being too small to admit of their doing so without great inconvenience, they had of course refused the invitations which had been sent them, and so naturally they had not formed any visiting connection whatever. But a day or two after the arrival of the piano, just as Lillian had taken off that apron, called in Kent, most appropriately, "a scuffling apron," and seated herself at work in the drawing-room, a ring at the gate bell announced visitors, and Rachel throwing open the door, announced Miss Simmonds.

Lillian rose as a small cheery-looking little body entered, dressed in a most homely manner; who, holding out both her hands to Lilly, said—

"My dear young lady, you'll excuse a stranger intruding upon you so early; but mine is no call of ceremony. I wished to make your acquaintance, and so came when it was likely you would be at home. I live within a door or two of you, and wish to be a real neighbour if you will let me."

"Pray be seated, Miss Simmonds," answered Lillian, charmed at once by her manner; "it is most kind of you."

“ Well, my dear, I should have come before, but I thought it better to wait a bit, and see the style in which you intended living, as you were new married people, and might have chosen a line very different to mine ; but as you seem to be more inclined for quiet than gaiety, I’ve ventured to come and make myself known to you, because it is pleasant, I think, when one comes to a strange neighbourhood to have a kindly smile and word when we pass in and out of church, or meet in the road.”

“ Indeed, yes,” answered Lillian ; “ we have not cultivated any acquaintance, because we did not think it prudent ; we are contented with a few friends who will visit us in a homely way ; in short, Miss Simmonds,” continued Lilly, smiling, “ we are trying to begin prudently, and giving parties is very expensive. Neither our purse nor house are large enough to entertain company.”

“ Quite right, my dear, I am glad you have had the moral courage to refrain from doing so, and that silly fashion of only calling, hindering your own time and other people’s, is much better left alone. Now I live in the small cottage nearly at the top of this road, it goes by the name of Ivy Lodge ; there I shall be delighted to see you when it suits you to come. No ceremony, no call for call ; but drop in

when you want something to do. I make a rule to walk from half-past eleven till one, when I dine. I drink tea at five, and then all that troublesome work of feeding one's self is over, unless I have made an indifferent meal at dinner or tea, and then I have a sandwich before I go to bed, which I do at ten regularly. That's my life, and for the last twenty years it's been just the same. It was busier and more exciting once, so that the peace that comes to me now is more delightful; but that's neither here nor there, if you and your husband like to slip in of an evening and play a rubber, or have a game at chess—I'm great at chess—I shall be pleased to see you; only understand it to be when you please, and not a work of necessity. I shall give you a cup of tea and some sandwiches exactly as I have myself, and make no strangers of you."

"You are very kind, and we shall be pleased to come and see you, but my husband does not come home till six, so we dine late; but if you will allow us to drop in after dinner, we shall like a game at chess very much some evening, and I hope you will come and see us."

"To be sure—to be sure—in the same way after you've had your dinner; in short, no feeding to be thought necessary on either hand," said the old

lady, laughing, as she rose to go; "it spoils all English society, and puts a stop to much pleasant intercourse, the necessity to provide entertainment, because what would otherwise be very agreeable must be abandoned by prudent people of small incomes because it's so expensive. Now we will set the world an example, my dear, won't we? Dear, dear, how we all think we could teach each other, don't we? Well, good-bye, I must go and finish my walk before dinner. I am pleased to have made your acquaintance;" and Miss Simmonds took her departure, having made a most favourable impression on Lillian. Notwithstanding her homely attire, she was so unmistakably a lady, and there was a warmth in her manner and a hearty grasp of the hand that spoke of sincerity, and seemed a surety to all whom she addressed that she meant what she said. Lilly therefore was full of Miss Simmonds when Leonard returned; and he said he was quite ready to go and see her, and pleased that his little wife should have a kind, neighbourly person so near her, as he had often feared she would be lonely, so accustomed as she was to a house full of people.

It was a lovely day on Tuesday—the day appointed for them to dine at Mr. Broughton's. It was arranged that Lilly should come up in the fly

to Harry's, bringing Leonard's things there for him to dress, for it was not worth while for him to go all the way home; indeed, he could not spare the time, as he was very busy. Lilly had settled for a sister of Rachel's to come and stay with her that evening and sleep there, as she did not like leaving her alone; for Lillian was most kind and considerate to her, and had quite won the love of the poor stupid girl. She tried so patiently and perseveringly to teach her, and was so gentle with her, notwithstanding her frequent mistakes, that she could not but love her. Lilly quite enjoyed the drive to Blackheath, and was amazed at the beauty of the place when she reached it. She could not help exclaiming, "What a shame he is a bachelor."

"Then, you see, Lillians do not grow on every hedge," answered Leonard smiling, as they drove up the avenue. Mr. Broughton came out on the steps to receive them, gave them a cordial welcome, and taking Lillian on his arm into the drawing-room, he introduced her to a lady who was seated on one of the luxurious couches of which the room was full, and said—

"I have asked this lady to meet you, as she is a neighbour of yours, and I wish to make you acquainted. She lives within a short walk of your house. Mrs. De Courcy—Mrs. Gray."

The lady rose and held out her small hand to Lillian, with a smile which lighted up her whole face, and added to the great beauty which Lilly thought she had never seen surpassed. She was dressed in most perfect taste, and so magnificently that Lillian felt "very small" in her plain, white, high, silk dress, which she had thought the proper sort of toilet to come and dine at a bachelor's house by themselves, as she had imagined they should do. She feared she must look very mean in Leonard's eyes (the only eyes she cared to study) beside the beauty in the splendid dress of emerald velvet, with point lace trimmings, contrasting so well with the dazzlingly white neck and shoulders. A diamond cross, hanging from a piece of narrow black velvet, glittered on her small, white throat, and a snake of green enamel, with diamond eyes, and a carbuncle in its head, coiled round her arm, as if alive; her hair was plaited round her head, and ornamented with small diamond stars.

To some tastes, Lillian, in her simple white silk, with small Honiton lace collar round her throat, fastened by a brooch formed of large turquoises—a wedding present from Harry—her small, well-shaped head, with the silken glossy hair, fastened by a plain gold comb, would have been more attractive;

but poor little Lillian herself felt she must sink into insignificance by the side of such splendour. Her attention had been so attracted by this lady, that she had not observed another occupant of the room—a young but remarkably pretty girl, having sufficient resemblance to the beautiful Mrs. De Courcy to cause no astonishment to Lillian when she called her and said—

“Come here, Beatrice, child, let me introduce you. My daughter, Mrs. Gray—getting too big for me to own her as such.”

She was very tall, and very slight, stooping a little, as though she had outgrown her strength; brilliantly fair as her mother, and with a great profusion of golden hair—the true golden, so seldom seen after babyhood.

Struck as she was by the extreme beauty of both mother and child, Lillian could not but contrast the dress of each—the splendour of the mother's and the tasteless meanness of the child's. A dress of white muslin, which must have been washed a dozen times, and utterly devoid of starch, much too short, made three-quarters high, with short sleeves, showing her thin neck and very thin arms. Her splendid hair brushed up clumsily, and an artificial white rose badly put into it, a broad blue and much-faded sash,

tied behind, completed a toilet which only loveliness such as hers could have shone above.

"She is not out, you know," said Mrs. De Courcy; "but she is such a pet of Mr. Broughton's, he insisted on my bringing her, and as he assured me there would only be you and your husband, I was obliged to consent."

A smile, bright and radiant as her mother's, spread over the girl's face; but more conversation was stopped by the announcement of dinner, and Mr. Broughton introducing Leonard to take Mrs. De Courcy in.

"Now, Mrs. Gray, you must allow me to take you and my little pet too. Come along, Beatrice," said Mr. Broughton, offering an arm to them both as he spoke, and they proceeded to the dinner-room, followed by Leonard and Mrs. De Courcy, Lillian, wondering what her husband thought of the beauty, and whether he felt ashamed of his wife by her side. She would have been very happy, and enjoyed the elegant dinner much more if she had known how much sweeter he thought the face of his own little wife, and how much he admired the tasteful simplicity of her dress, so well suited to her age and position.

When the ladies left the dinner-table, Mr. Broughton told Leonard that Mrs. De Courcy was

the widow of an old friend of his, who had died some three or four years ago, leaving her with this only daughter and one son, for whom he had obtained a situation in a merchant's house abroad. She had a small property of her own, but he had died penniless, and she was living with her daughter in a small house close to the Grays.

"She is a most delightful, clever woman, and manages to have most agreeable evenings, to which I think your wife would enjoy going. Her beauty and fascination make up for splendour of entertainment, and she has some of the best literary people of the day at her house, giving no refreshment but tea, coffee, and ices. She sings delightfully, as you will hear, speaks any modern language fluently, and in short——"

"In short, it is a wonder she has remained a widow," said Leonard, smiling.

"Well, it is; but I suppose that great girl stands in her way; she is very beautiful, don't you think?"

"Yes, very beautiful; but quite a child, is she not?"

"Well, she is called so," said Mr. Broughton, smiling; "but she is turned eighteen, as I well know."

"Poor girl, what a shame," said Leonard; "then she is not introduced, I suppose?"

"Oh! her mamma would not think of it, she hopes to keep her in at least two more seasons," answered Mr. Broughton.

"And how does the young lady bear it?" asked Leonard.

"Like an angel, as she is, I believe; gentle, docile, and obedient, she knows no will but her mother's, and contents herself at home with the most simple, child-like amusements, asking for nothing else. I always insist on her coming here, and she delights in it."

"The dress is a contrast to the mother's," said Leonard.

"Yes, indeed; but the girl is not out, you know; it does not signify what school-girls wear. Will you take any more wine?"

"Not any, thank you," said Leonard.

"Then we will go to the ladies."

When they entered the drawing-room they found Lillian and the De Courcys looking over prints. Mrs. De Courcy talking and laughing, and captivating as well as astonishing Lilly with her wit and humour. Mr. Broughton rang for coffee, and then requested Mrs. De Courcy to sing; she complied at

once, and opening the splendid grand piano, she sat down and sang song after song, without notes—German, French, Spanish, Italian, each in its own style, and finished with the simple ballad of “Auld Robin Gray,” sung with such exquisite pathos that Lilly was in tears; at its conclusion, before its effect had time to pass away, she said—

“Come, Beatrice, come and try that little Neapolitan duet with me.”

“I cannot, mamma dear, really,” answered the girl, earnestly.

“Oh, yes, my dear, nonsense; don’t be affected; come and try.”

Rising at once, and going to the piano with her face and neck covered with blushes, the poor girl began; and out of time, and out of tune, sang the soprano part of a little simple Italian air, arranged as a duet. At the end of the first verse her mother stopped, crying out—

“Oh, my child, my child! that won’t do, indeed; never mind, you have done your best;” and poor Beatrice turned back to her seat, with burning cheeks and eyes suffused with tears; and Lillia from that moment hated Mrs. De Courcy.

Yes, simple and ignorant as Lillian was in the world and its ways, she could not help seeing that

the intention of the mother was to make the child her foil; that that fresh, gay, beautiful, innocent girl was a mere tool in the hands of her who should so tenderly have loved and cherished her, and all Lillian's delight in Mrs. De Courcy's beauty, her fascination, and her wonderful musical talent, was destroyed at once. She took an opportunity to cross over to the side of Beatrice and talk kindly to her, and indeed gave her her whole attention, whilst Mrs. De Courcy engaged that of both the gentlemen until the carriages were announced.

"Now *do* come and see me, Mrs. Gray, and let me come and see you, won't you?" said Mrs. De Courcy, with another of her sweet smiles.

"We live so very quietly," began Lillian.

"Oh, so do I," interrupted Mrs. De Courcy; "my child will tell you ours is a most humdrum life. We live on mutton chops and rice puddings, and have a few pleasant evenings in the height of the season, which cost next to nothing; but I assure you we are most homely folks, are we not, Beatrice, darling?"

"I am sure Mrs. Gray will be pleased to call on you," said Leonard, "only she is shy of making new friends, because we do not profess to be able to give entertainments."

"No, of course not, why should you ? but living so near we might have some pleasant chats together, over 'the cup which cheers but not inebriates,' might we not, Mr. Gray ? Now, mind, I shall come and fetch you," she said, turning again to Lillian. "Good night. Come, my child. Oh ! dear Mr. Broughton might we have our wraps in here ? Your rooms are so delightfully warm, and the evenings get chilly now ; if I go out into the hall, I shall catch cold to a certainty ; I am so ridiculously susceptible to cold."

Mr. Broughton rang directly, and ordering in Mrs. De Courcy's things, he and Leonard were most assiduous in the cloaking of the fair ladies—a beautiful bournouse of scarlet cashmere, with a rich bordering of gold braid, lined throughout with white silk, covered the fair shoulders of the mother, and a square of black lace was tied in a most becoming style over her head, while a black and white woollen shawl was wrapped round the slight figure of the daughter, and she was recommended to turn the corner of it over her head if she felt chilly ; but with her usual bright smile she answered—

"I am not at all cold, thank you, mamma ;" and cordially shaking Lillian's extended hand, she whispered, "do come and see us."

Lillian nodded assent, and then asking if she might get her cloak, the Grays took their leave of Mr. Broughton, and the two carriages drove off together, leaving the bachelor in his elegant, luxurious home, to think that a humbler one, with a loving wife to share it, would be brighter and pleasanter.

"Oh, Leonard, darling," said Lilly, as soon as she got into the carriage, "what a hateful woman."

"Hateful! my dear girl, she is the most beautiful, fascinating creature I ever saw."

"I admit her beauty and fascination, but that dear girl, how shameful her conduct is to her."

"What, keeping her in, and making a child of her?" said Leonard, laughing. "Beautiful women will do that; it's inconvenient having a grown-up daughter as pretty, if not prettier, than herself."

"I don't mean only that, but making her sing, knowing she could not, just after her own beautiful performance, and dressing her in such a fashion."

"Oh! she was plainly dressed, certainly; but she's young."

"Plainly! Leonard; she was disgracefully dressed, poor thing, in that flimsy muslin, too short for her, and that rubbishing flower stuck in

her beautiful hair. I declare I could have cried; I felt I hated the woman."

"Halloa! halloa! my pet getting violent?"

"It makes me so, really, to such injustice. I have promised that poor girl to go and see them for her sake, otherwise I would not set foot inside the house."

"Well, I think it will be very kind of you to take notice of her, certainly, for I fancy she is a little badly used; still one must forgive a great deal to such a woman."

"Then you like her better than me," said Lilly, pretending to pout and cry.

"Of course I do; do you not suppose that I have been regretting the whole evening that you were not exactly like her, and thinking what an ugly, dowdy thing you looked?"

"No; but really, Leonard, without joking, did I look nice enough for you not to be ashamed of me?" asked Lilly, pleadingly.

"Shall I tell you what you looked like? a pure and matchless pearl, which I would not have changed for all the gems which ever were—not even for the splendid ruby shining by your side—does that poetical answer satisfy my little wife?"

“Quite, dearest,” answered Lilly; and they talked on other subjects until they reached home.

Rachel and her sister had gone to bed by Lilly’s orders; Leonard had the latch-key; but she inspected the kitchen and all the places, and found everything neatly and tidily put away, for which she determined to praise Rachel in the morning, as untidiness was one of her great faults, against which Lillian had had to struggle.

The first morning, she had found her washing up the tea things by pouring little drops of water from one cup to the other, and drying them on a duster, and she assured Lillian that was the way she had always done them at home, with a variety of other neat little performances of the same kind; she was gradually improving in such things now, though still very full of slovenly ways, and therefore, Lillian was particularly pleased to find in her absence that everything had been properly done.

Accordingly when she went to the kitchen to order dinner, she gave her due praise, at which Rachel appeared much delighted; the sister had not gone home, but was seated in the kitchen when Lillian entered—a strange, weird-looking, little body she was, but with a sharp, intelligent face

which proclaimed her age was more, than her size would have led any one to imagine.

She dropped a curtsey to Lillian, in answer to her kindly "Good morning;" and after Lilly had given her orders, she turned to her, and asked how old she was?

"Sixteen year old, miss."

"Ma'am," corrected Rachel.

"Then you are the eldest, Rachel?" said Lillian.

"The holdest of the girls, miss," answered the little body, evidently most anxious herself to enlighten Lilly about their family history; "there's two boys holder, one in Muster Tape's shop, t'other at sea."

"Have you not been to service?"

"No, miss."

"Ma'am," again prompted Rachel.

"Mother," continued her sister, unheeding the interruption, "'as never been hable to spare me, she's 'ad such a sight of babbies, and I've 'ad 'em all to nuss."

Lillian smiled, as she answered, "Then you will soon be well fitted for a nursemaid's place, being so used to children?"

"No, thank you, miss."

"Oh, dear, Anna Maria; *ma'am!*" said poor Rachel, emphatically.

Still unheeding the correction, the strange little body continued, "I'd much rayther not, I'm sick to death of babbies."

"Then you do not intend going out to service at all?" asked Lillian, finding she had got a character, and anxious to draw her out more.

"Well, miss," began the girl; but poor Rachel could stand it no longer, and, in despair, broke in with,

"Oh, *ma'am!* please excuse her; the only lady she ever speaks to is Miss Stubbs, the Sunday-school teacher, and she always calls her miss, and so 'as got a habit of it; but it is perverse on you, when I keeps on a correcting you, Anna Maria."

"Never mind," said Lillian, kindly, "it is a compliment. Anna Maria thinks no one can be *ma'am* who looks so young; but we must not interrupt her, she was going to tell me what service she would like to take. I might get her a place if I knew what she wanted."

"It's no use no one getting me a place," answered Anna Maria. "I used to think and 'ope I should get rid of the babbies when I was growed up, but I never have growed up, and never shall now, and

short gals is no use in any service, they won't 'ave 'em. Try a housemaid—why, I couldn't reach to make a 'igh bed, I couldn't; try a parlour-maid—why, I couldn't put a heavy joint on the table; cook—couldn't lift a saucepan hoff the fire of no size; no, it ain't no use, I must stay along with the babbies; and I assure you, miss-iss, that I've allays got Bobby's 'eavy 'ead on my shoulder night and day."

"Do you have the child to sleep with you, then?"

"No, hin my dreams I mean; there he lays for hever; he's a drefful 'eavy 'eaded one, 'e is."

Absurd as it was, there was something pathetic in this to Lillian, too. The poor girl, her growth probably stunted by the constant nursing of babies, the air and exercise required by her age denied her, made prematurely old, and the hope blighted, which had been so strong in her—to go and work for her living, to be paid and well fed for her labour, instead of receiving only for her hard and thankless office, meagre food, and, too often, probably rough words; but Lillian felt that the right thing was to place the matter in a bright light to the girl, and not encourage her discontent by pitying her, so she said—

"Well, I am sure it must be a great comfort to

you to think you are such a help to your poor mother, and the babies will grow up out of arms soon, and I daresay your mother will not have any more. How old is the youngest?"

"He's a'most two, miss, but he ain't no sense to go at all, and I don't know when he will; he ain't altogether right, mother thinks, 'is 'ead is so awful big and 'is legs so awful little."

"Poor little child! do I understand Rachel right in saying that you go to the Sunday-school still?"

"Yes; I goes regular of a morning. I never had no other larning than that."

"Then you can read, but not write, I suppose?"

"No, miss—Oh! ma'am, isn't it? I can't write, though I've tried often to imitate the book letters with a skewer in the dust; but it's awkward work with Bobby in my lap all the time."

"It must be, indeed; you live near here, do you not?"

"Yes, miss, about half a mile. Carpenter's Alley it's called; fust house on the right."

"Well, I will come and see your mother, and try if I can get her to alter your life a little; you go home now, in case you are wanted, and I will come to-morrow if it's fine, or perhaps to-day."

Something like a smile—perhaps a mere reflec-

tion of Lillian's—passed over the solemn, haggard face of the girl, as she answered—

“And thank you kindly, too ; a change *would* be a change.”

Lillian wished her good-bye, and then called Rachel from the little scullery, where she had gone during this conversation, to get the potatoes ready for dinner, glad to find some employment out of the kitchen that she might not have to hear Anna Maria's provoking mistakes.

“Give your sister,” said Lillian, “a chop off that cold loin of mutton ; there will still be enough for us, for we will take some fish if some comes to the door. I do not like to keep her to dinner, as she may be wanted at home ; but she looks as if a little meat would do her good, so let her take that home, and put a pint of beer in a bottle for her, she can bring the bottle back when she has time.”

“Yes, ma'am, thank you ; she's very stupid, but she don't mean no harm.”

“I don't think she would have been stupid if she had had a better chance ; but now we must get on, Rachel, for talking to her has rather hindered us.”

After luncheon, Lillian thought she would go and see Miss Simmonds, and should she have time,

walk on to Mrs. Bunting's, Rachel's mother; she had promised Mrs. Leigh she would walk every day as a positive duty, and was glad when an object took her some little distance. She often wished her mother lived within a walk, that she might have somewhere to go. This journey to Mrs. Bunting's would give her a mile to walk, and a good object to be obtained at the same time, so she started off very happily.

Miss Simmonds was at home, and she found the old lady seated in her little parlour, busy over some flannel work. A large sleek cat lay on the rug beside her, and on the back of her chair was perched a raven. A stand in the window full of hot-house plants scenting the room, and some beautiful water-colour drawings on the walls, gave an air to the small and plainly-furnished apartment, which told evidently it was inhabited by a lady. She herself was dressed in a dark print gown, with a white muslin handkerchief folded under the body, just showing above the neck a small white neat cap, with net strings, covering her grey hair, and black mittens on her hands, one of which Lillian noticed was deformed, having lost two fingers.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Gray, how do you do? I hope you won't think me a witch, with my Familiar

on my chair, and repent your visit. You are not timid of live things?"

"Oh, dear no, not in the least, Miss Simmonds, thank you. I'm very fond of pets, and wish I had some at home."

"Ah! well, my dear, you won't want for pets by and by," said the old lady, laughing her merry little laugh; "better pets than these; I make shift with them for want of better—Jack and Jill I call them."

"Jill! Jill! Jill!" croaked the raven directly, whereupon the cat awoke, and curling its back up, and uttering a little purr by way of answer, slowly walked towards the bird, who immediately descended on its back, and began to "mew" in imitation of Pussy.

"Be quiet, you noisy thing, do, or I'll put you in your cage," said Miss Simmonds. "You see, my dear," she continued, turning to Lillian, "I am so much alone, that I fear I encourage Jack to talk for amusement. I must apologize for him. The fact is, I was so used to young folks about me, that I felt I must have something noisy and talkative to make up for the loss of them. I was a governess until I met with my misfortune," raising slightly as she spoke her maimed hand, "and then I was laid up for many months, to come from my sick-room a cripple, unable any longer to pursue my avocation."

“What was the accident?” asked Lillian; “a burn?”

“Blown up with gunpowder, trying a foolish experiment: it served me right for my folly. But, God be praised, heavy as the trial was, it did me a great deal of good; brought me, as all our sorrows are meant to do, nearer to God. I started a small school, when I was able, for middle-class children, who did not require music, which I was no longer able to teach; but it did not answer well, and I was in a sad strait for a time. But some dear good friends came to my rescue, and placed me, by their exertions, on the National Benevolent Institution, on which blessed bounty I have subsisted ever since. This comfortable room, and my little bed-room adjoining, are found me by one of those dear friends, and all honour be to him for his charity, for I believe that he robs himself to help me. He is not rich, and works hard for what he gets. If an old woman’s grateful prayers are heard above, he will not lack a mansion there.”

“You have deserved help, I am sure, Miss Simmonds,” said Lillian, touched by a tale so simply told; “and I think it seldom fails to come to those who do. You seem to have a most comfortable little home here; and those lovely

drawings, were those your doing before your accident?"

"No, my dear; they were presents from my young pupils. Bless them! One was a sweet artist—quite a genius. I was for thirty years of my life a governess, and yet I cannot, by my own experience, confirm one tale I hear and read of, of the ill-usage they suffer from. I had only four situations all the time, and in each met with all the kindness and consideration I could desire or expect. Was I not fortunate?"

"You were, certainly; but I think it must be as much the fault of the governesses as of the people who employ them when they are used badly, and the cases must be exceptional," said Lilly.

"I believe so too, my dear; but it has been such a nice subject for books, that it has been written about until it is believed in. If a young woman keeps her place, and behaves herself like a lady, she will be, as a rule, treated as such; if she becomes intrusive and domineering, she brings the result upon herself. And, now, I have never asked after your husband; I hope he is well, and that you mean soon to bring him to challenge me with a game at chess."

"He is quite well, thank you. I shall be pleased to bring him any evening," said Lillian.

"Well, then, why not to-morrow? It will be quite an act of charity to honour my poor little room with your presence, and cheer up the lonely hours of a poor old woman."

"You may rely on us then, Miss Simmonds. We will be with you at half-past seven."

"Thank you very much; it will be quite a red-letter day to me. You remind me so forcibly of one of my favourite pupils that I felt I must love you directly I saw you."

"I am so glad, it is nice to be loved; but I must bid you good-bye now until to-morrow."

"Good-bye, my dear young lady; in its fullest and holiest sense I say it, May God be with you. We need His love and care at all times, but never more, I believe, than in the first year of wedded life."

Jack, who, perched still on the cat's back, had, apparently quite understanding his mistress's orders, been perfectly quiet, only eyeing curiously the strange lady, when she rose to go, said, with wonderful distinctness, "Good-bye, but don't be long."

"Before you come again, Jack means," said

Miss Simmonds, laughing. "We hope she won't, Jack—don't we?"

Lillian repeated her promise to come, and again cordially shaking her hand, she took her leave of her new-found friend, more than ever impressed in her favour.

CHAPTER IV.

ANNA MARIA "AT HOME."

LILLIAN next proceeded towards Carpenter's Alley, and with some difficulty finding it, she knocked at the first house, as directed by Anna Maria. She was answered by the poor girl herself, with the inevitable baby in her arms.

"Oh! I ham just glad; I 'ave been a-waiting and a-watching, and he seems 'eavier than hever," she whispered; and then, in a louder tone, "Come hin, please. Mother, the lady."

A poor, worn, weary-looking woman, with rough hair, over which was stuck a piece of black net as an apology for a cap, rose from her chair as Lilly entered. The room contained but little furniture; the chief contents seemed all on the chimney-piece, which was literally crowded with china images, tin plates, little glass pictures, and china mugs, being, as red and blue letters on the sides informed one, "A present for a good boy"—"A present for a

good girl." A table in the centre, one against the wall, on which was a tray, a very shabby-looking Bible, and a few books, evidently school prizes; a three-legged stool, and four chairs, with the original seats supplied with old carpet, comprised the whole of the furniture. A door was partially open leading to the upstairs room, and on the stairs Lillian could see a heap of old things thrown, which had been carelessly pushed there when she knocked.

Two children with sore faces, one three and the other four years old, were seated on the ground, sucking some bread covered with treacle, putting as much outside their faces as inside their mouths; and as Mrs. Bunting handed Lillian a chair, she said—

"Do, for gracious sake, Anna Maria, take and wash them children's faces, and take away that stuff from 'em: whatever did you give it them for?"

"Why, they wouldn't eat it at dinner, mother."

"Well, take it away now, and wash 'em up, do. Give me the baby."

Of course, removing the bread and treacle caused an alarming duet of roars; so, taking one child under each arm, Anna Maria dragged herself

and them upstairs, the mother closing the door after them ; and peace was sufficiently restored to enable Lillian to hear herself speak, though the fact that they were still roaring upstairs was quite evident. As she looked round the room at the house from which Rachel had come, how could she wonder that the girl was untidy and slovenly. Could she be anything else ?

“I have come,” she said, “Mrs. Bunting, to talk to you about Anna Maria. I find that she is kept at home to help you with the children, and of course that is quite right, her first duty is to you ; but I fancy her health suffers a little by the confinement and want of change. She seems anxious to learn, too. Now I have many hours of my time unoccupied, and I thought if you would let her come to me each day for about an hour and a half or two hours, I might teach her to write and cast accounts, so as to enable her eventually to get a place as shopwoman. She does not seem to fancy house service.”

Very nervously Lilly had made this long speech ; she was not at all accustomed to make suggestions of her own, or offer advice to people older than herself, as most young ladies of the present day are so ready to do. She had never been a district visitor,

and lectured poor hard-working women of double her age and experience as to how to bring up a family; and she felt frightened the moment the words were out of her lips—quite as alarmed as she would have been to suggest to some peeress to make some alteration in the management of her child. It did not occur to Lillian that, because the woman was very poor and very uneducated, she, a young thing only just twenty, might in any way *command* her to do as *she* thought best about the girl, and she waited with some anxiety for the reply. She did not know that the poor bring this greatly on themselves, by the readiness some of them show to consent to anything, to please those whom they think will help them; out of whom, they imagine, they can get money, food, or clothing; and so was greatly relieved when Mrs. Bunting said—

"Just as you please, ma'am. I'm sure, if you like to have the trouble, Anna Maria will be pleased enough."

"And you could spare her, without inconvenience for that length of time?"

"Oh yes, ma'am, I would manage somehow. This here boy is a terrible hand."

Poor little thing, he was lying with his heavy large head on his mother's shoulder, reminding Lil-

lian of poor Anna Maria's sad complaint—it did look a “’eavy ’ead” indeed.

“I don’t understand anything about children,” said Lillian, “but I think something might be done for him. He cannot be quite right. I wish my mother could see him. When she comes to stay with me, you must bring him up to see her. She is a great baby doctor.”

“Thank you, ma’am. Poor Bobby! his father sets great store by him; but I don’t think he’ll live. He takes very little notice, and, though a’most two year old, can’t run. I never had one like him afore.”

“Well, I will let you know when my mother comes. Then I shall expect Anna Maria to-morrow at four o’clock, and I hope to make a bright scholar of her.”

“I’m greatly obliged, ma’am,” said Mrs. Bunting, as Lilly rose to go. “I’ll be sure to send her.”

At that moment down came poor Anna Maria with the two children, restored to serenity, and with faces looking as clean as the soreness of them would admit.

Lilly just stopped to tell Anna Maria of her arrangement, and receive a strange look from her of mingled wonder and gratitude in return; and

then she took her way home, purchasing on her way a copy-book and simple reading-book for her new pupil.

When Leonard came home she had a great deal to tell him, which she knew he always liked; and she described her two visits and her conversation with Anna Maria most graphically, and greatly to Leonard's amusement.

"And now," he said, when she had finished, "I have something to tell *you*. I met your father in town, and he says they want us to go on Saturday there; you to go for all day and me to dinner, to fetch you home. They say you are awfully missed."

"Ah! dear things, I daresay they do miss me. We can go—can't we, dear?"

"Oh yes, certainly! An omnibus from the top of this road will put you down at the 'Red Lion,' and from there you can walk, if fine; it's only three or four minutes' walk from there, you know. If you tell them what time you will be there, they can meet you."

"Yes, exactly; that will be famous," said Lilly. "Do you know, darling," she began again, after a moment's pause, "I am rather fidgety about the bills. I'm afraid I have not been a good house-keeper."

"Indeed! Let us hear all about it," said Leonard, smiling.

"Well, you said you would pay every quarter—did you not, dear?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, so I have not looked at the bills every week; but yesterday I told Rachel to give me all that had been sent in, and I'm frightened, dear. Do you know, the butcher's bill is £2 a week; the grocer's, 15s.; the baker's, 6s.; and then there's my house-book, with odd and end things, and milk and fish besides."

"Poor little woman!" said Leonard. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write down, as I should have done at first, what I think each housekeeping item ought to be—indeed, the farthest we can go—and then you shall try how near you can keep it to that. I hope next year not to have occasion to be so very particular, for I think, darling, I am making my way. It's up-hill work; but I have an order from a very rich man to build a new wing to his house, down in Herefordshire; and, with Mr. Broughton's work too, I am doing well, I hope. So do not worry yourself, my little darling bird," he continued, rising, and kissing her.

"I always so hoped," she said, "I shouldn't be

a 'Dora' of a wife. It's very pretty in a book, but must be a great bore really; and dear mamma took such pains to teach me, that I should be ashamed to make stupid mistakes. But she always said, and I see now, how true it is, that no teaching is like experience. I shall do better next quarter, Leonard dear, particularly if you will kindly do as you say, give me an idea how far I may go."

"Yes; and I think I will alter my arrangements, and pay every week, giving you the money every Monday morning. What do you think of that?"

"I shall like it so much better, dear."

"All right, then, it shall be done after this first quarter."

"And, dear, one thing more," said Lilly. "I think I should like you to put £40 of that money dear papa gave me in some good savings'-bank. I do not want it. I have heaps of clothes, and £10 is ample pocket-money. I have spent nothing yet but the fly to Blackheath."

"I will do that for you certainly, dear. I will take it to town to-morrow, if you like."

"Thank you, darling. Now I won't bother you about nasty money any more, but come and sing to you."

"It's a sad fact, Lilly," he said, as they crossed the drawing-room, "that it's getting too cold to smoke out of doors. What is to be done?"

"Well, there is a fire-place in the little room that I use for my housekeeping-room, where the linen and china cupboards are. It is very small, but it will do for a smoking-room."

"I think it would, Lilly. A good thought; but there I should not have my little wife to talk all the time, I suppose?"

"That you know you could not expect," said Lilly, smiling.

"That will be very economical then, for I should soon give it up if you were not by to talk to."

Lillian only laughed, and let him think that so it was to be.

The next morning, after seeing him off as usual, and reminding him that they were engaged at Miss Simmonds' in the evening, Lilly set to work busily to prepare the little room for a smoking-room; for her mother's instructions were well remembered, that nothing must be wanting that could make home comfortable and attractive.

There was no carpet to this small room, so the first thing she did was to start off to a small draper's in a neighbouring street, and buy—with her own

money she was proud to think—a piece of Dutch carpeting and a small rug, a skein of carpet thread and needles ; and requesting the parcel should be sent home immediately, get quickly home again, and set Rachel to work to scrub the room out, and put a nice little fire in it to dry and air it.

The carpet soon arrived, and then Lilly sat down to make it herself. By luncheon time she had nearly finished it, so she told Rachel she could not stop working to come to lunch, she must bring her some bread and cheese on a plate and a glass of beer ; and so she worked on, and with delight laid down the carpet herself. She had made it into a little square one, so that it could be easily taken up and shaken. Then, bringing from her own bedroom a little folding-chair, which had been her own at home, and a settee, which had been put into the spare bedroom out of the way, she surveyed the room with great satisfaction. The only thing it wanted was a table ; that they must wait and get some day ; she thought a little second-hand one would do quite well. So, fetching the cigar-stand, tray for the ashes, and lights, she placed those on the chimney-piece, with a pair of candlesticks ready for lighting, and was well satisfied with her morning's work. She had just seated herself in the

drawing-room to rest, and enjoy a book, until her pupil, poor Anna Maria, came, when a loud ring at the gate bell startled her. She sprang from the sofa, and Rachel, opening the door, announced Mrs.—something, Lillian could not say what. But one glance at the beautiful, elegant being entering the room was enough ; it was Mrs. De Courcy.

“Now, you see I am come. I said I would,” was her first salutation. “How do you do?”

“Quite well, thank you, Mrs. De Courcy,” answered Lillian. She felt most ungraciously.

“I have had rather a job to find you, but I was most persevering, and here I am. How is your handsome husband? for he is most decidedly handsome.”

“Quite well, thank you. And Miss De Courcy—is she not with you?”

“No; I ventured all alone, without even my big child to take care of me. She was amusing herself in some way, and so I came off quite on the impulse of the moment; and now, will you come back with me to my little quiet tea, and we’ll leave a message for the hubby to follow us as soon as he comes in.”

“Thank you, I really could not to-day. I have an appointment at four, and in the evening we are engaged at a neighbour’s.”

"Oh, how unfortunate! Saturday then. For I will not have you for a mere call; I want you to come and spend an hour or two with me. Do come on Saturday."

"On Saturday we dine and spend the day with my mother and father."

"And to-morrow I am engaged. You'd be horrified if I suggested Sunday, I suppose."

"We should rather not go out on Sunday, certainly," said Lillian.

"No, I thought not. Then it must be left until next week, when I do hope you will find a day. Only, when you do come, make up your mind to stay, and let your husband come for you. I am purely selfish in asking you, for I have no inducement to offer you but a hearty welcome; and if you have an artistic taste, I can show you a few gems, in the way of paintings and that kind of thing."

"You are very good. I will tell my husband."

"Do. I am sure he will come; he *promised* me. And now I must run away, or I shall be benighted, the days draw in so fast. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Gray," and wringing Lilly's hand very warmly, Mrs. De Courcy departed.

Anna Maria arrived just as she went, greatly to Lillian's comfort, for she hoped making herself

useful to the poor child would make her feel better tempered; Mrs. De Courcy's visit not having improved her feelings.

The first writing was a very wonderful performance; the tongue was, of course, engaged in the service, and the holding of the pen as the skewer used to be held, so difficult to alter, that the effect produced on the paper had more the appearance of the peregrination of a large spider which had been rescued from suicide in the ink-bottle, than any sort of caligraphy.

The reading was much better, and the catechism quite perfect; but when Lilly came to inquire what it meant, that was quite another thing. But she thought she would not plague her with many questions or explanations the first day, but proceeded to the arithmetic, setting her the "two's" to learn in her multiplication table for next time, and showing her what adding meant. By the time this was ended she found it was half-past five, and so Lilly dismissed her poor anxious pupil with great encouragement, poor Anna Maria saying as she went out, "I can learn the tables with Bobby in my lap."

Eagerly Lillian awaited Leonard's return home; but she said nothing to him about the room, nor did he mention it until after dinner, when, on rising

from the table, she placed her arm in his, and led him towards the room in which she had desired Rachel to light the candles, and placing him on the settee, and throwing herself in the little lounging-chair, said—

“Well!”

“My little Lillian? there could be only one good fairy to do all this. You are what may be inelegantly, but, nevertheless, forcibly, called a *brick!*”

“And you like it, dear?” asked Lillian.

“Indeed I do. Let me show you at once how thoroughly I appreciate it by smoking one of my very best. All my things, too, here! You stunning little woman! and you are going to stay and chat with me?”

“Yes, I got my own chair down on purpose to show you I meant to be here; and now I will get my work, and we will be cosy.”

“If we were to have a nice little table put here, Lilly,” he said, when she returned with her work, “we might really use this room in the winter evenings; it will be delightfully warm and snug.”

“It would, but we must not desert the drawing-room on account of the poor piano; it would get so

damp ; and I think an unused room in a house is such a comfortless-looking thing."

"So it is; that's true, we must have some arrangement about it."

"Oh ! Leonard," said Lillian, jumping up suddenly, "we are both forgetting poor Miss Simmonds."

"So we are, I declare. What time did you say ?"

"Half-past seven."

"It wants half an hour then. Hurrah ! I can finish my cigar."

A ring at the gate bell while they sat and chattered was followed by Rachel with a note for Lillian. On delicate pink paper, scented with otto of roses, the note was written ; and opening it, Lilly, glancing at the signature, tossed it, with a look of annoyance, to Leonard.

"They are waiting an answer, ma'am," said Rachel.

"All right, Rachel, we will ring when we are ready. What are you so horrified at, Lilly ?"

"Mrs. De Courcy," said Lillian. "I am sure it is an invitation."

"It is, for Monday. We must go, Lill. I think Mr. Broughton wishes us to know her. I should not like to disoblige him."

"Very well, then, I must say yes. What does she say?"

"'Dear Mrs. Gray,'" read Leonard, "'I have just remembered a most agreeable and clever man has promised to come to us, with his daughter, on Monday evening, quite in a friendly way. Do come. Yours sincerely, Isoline De Courcy.'"

"Well, we must go then, I suppose," and, like a victim, Lilly rose, and went to write a note in reply; and then she and Leonard started for Miss Simmonds', Lillian saying it was delightful to go and spend the evening with this dear old lady; and she only wished that it was to be on Tuesday, that she might recover her equanimity, for she knew the Monday evening entertainment would disturb it excessively. Miss Simmonds was delighted to see them, and they both agreed that they had never passed a more thoroughly agreeable evening.

CHAPTER V.

OLD MEMORIES.

AT Old Court the moments were being anxiously counted on that Saturday which was to welcome Lillian on her first visit to her old home. The girls had gone off to meet her where the omnibus stopped, long before it could possibly be there, as their mother assured them; but they said it was something to do, and they could not stay quiet in doors.

With difficulty could they restrain their inclination to seize her as she got out of the omnibus, and hug and kiss her there and then. How their tongues did run all the way home, and how they made up for lost time when they got there, and hugged her to the imminent peril of her pretty little straw bonnet; and how they kept admiring her, and saying she was prettier than ever, till Mrs. Leigh interfered, and insisted on their leaving her alone, and letting her get her things off comfortably.

She had much to say and they to hear; and when they had helped her to undress, they, with their arms twined round her, led her to the warm parlour, where the wood fire, brightly burning, was getting pleasant now; and there they sat, the three sisters, and the mother with her work, smiling gently at their talk, listening to her young married daughter's first experiences, living her own young days over again as she listened.

"And do you find Rachel improving now, dear?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, mamma dear, she is better, certainly; but did you ever hear anything to equal the oyster story?"

"Only to be matched by a servant of mine, dear, who put sweet sauce over the broiled mutton, and caper sauce over the fried pudding."

"Oh! that is good; I must tell Leonard that, for he thinks no one can be so dull as my poor Rachel. I was stupid not to know how much milk to take, was I not? that first evening; but I do not think I have made any very great mistakes since I have been a housekeeper, thanks to you, darling," she continued, jumping up and kissing her mother; "only I think I have not been quite economical enough for our means—our butcher's bill

has been £2 a week ; that is too much, is it not ?”

“ Yes, dear, I think it is ; I should say twenty-five shillings a week was enough, with fish and soup.”

“ How can I help it ; will you show me, dear ?”

“ I will write you a week’s bill of fare before you go, which will not cost you more than that for butcher’s meat, I am sure.”

“ Oh, thank you, dear ; I am certain all my bills are too much, and that you could make them less.”

“ Well, we will go through it by and by ; but you must not, in your wish to economize, give your husband bad dinners—that will never do.”

“ Oh, no, mamma dear, I know I must not do that ; I think a comfortless, mean dinner would make even my husband cross.”

“ Even *her* husband !” said Helen, laughing. “ I believe, ma’ dear, she thinks no one ever had such a husband before.”

“ So she ought to think, Nelly dear,” answered her mother ; “ and may she never have cause to alter her opinion. And how did you enjoy your visit to Mr. Broughton’s ?”

“ Oh, very much ; it is a lovely place. But I met such a strange person there ;” and Lillian gave

a description of Mrs. De Courcy and her daughter, to the delight of her sisters, who became instantly deeply interested in Beatrice, and elicited a promise from Lillian to introduce them to her when they came to stay, which their mother had promised they should in the Christmas holidays.

“ Oh, mamma dear,” said Lillian, when they were alone for a few moments after lunch—the girls having been sent to see some young ladies who had called on them—“ do tell me about Agatha Hepburn.”

A slight flush covered her mother's pale gentle face, as Lillian uttered this name ; but she said quietly,

“ I will tell you, as I have promised to do so, if I have time before the girls come in, but I do not care to talk about it to them at present.”

“ You shall not tell me, mother darling, if you would rather not.”

“ It is only silliness which makes me object. The honest truth is, I was once very jealous of Agatha Hepburn, and she tried to do me an injury, long enough forgotten and forgiven, but her name has still an unpleasant association in my mind. We were neighbours down in Hampshire, in the very place where now she lives—a quiet, out of the way,

romantic little place, nestled amongst our verdant hills, as though, as Dickens says about a house, it had lost its way playing at hide and seek with other villages. And there our young days were passed. We were always rivals, somehow; as children, the nurses quarrelled over us; and at the daily school in the village, which we both attended, we had each our own advocates, some voting for Agatha and some for me. When she was about twenty-two and I nearly twenty, your father came on a visit to a family in the village; we were both invited to a party at the house, and Agatha Hepburn fell in love with the then young and very handsome Harry Leigh."

"Oh, mamma!" interrupted Lillian, "why, it's quite a novel; and you fell in love with him too. I see it all."

Mrs. Leigh smiled, as she answered, "Well, something of the sort, I think it was, Lillian; any way, through all our rivalry before, we had been good friends, but now Agatha seemed to dislike me; the more attention your father paid me, the more she spoke scornfully and coldly to me. I did not know why, for I was not, of course, aware that she loved him. When he left Horndean, he took my heart away with him, and gave me every reason

to believe that he left his with me. A day or two after his departure he wrote to my father to propose for me; and to make short my story, we were engaged, and I was very happy for a time; but one day, Agatha, who had seemed to shun me for some time, came to see me, and said she wanted to speak to me particularly; it was to tell me a long tale of your father's inconstancy—of all he had said to her and others, and to warn me against him. But I only laughed, and said I believed him, and no one should make me doubt him. Then she said, 'Look here, he gave me this; will you believe me now?' and placed in my hand a small packet, which, on opening, I found contained a locket filled with dark hair, and written on the paper, in his handwriting, 'A token of love from H. L.' It's a long time ago, Lillian dear, but even now I recollect with a shudder what I felt then, and how I suffered afterwards. I rushed to my mother with the foolish impetuosity of my nature, and refusing resolutely to tell her why, bid her write and say nothing would induce me to marry Harry Leigh. And then followed a long dreary time, too sad to recall, suffice it, dear child, for you to know that a dangerous illness, in which her life was despaired of, brought penitence to Agatha, and she confessed that the locket was

confided to her to give to me ; and with bitter tears and trembling hands she wrote a letter to your father imploring his forgiveness, as she had mine, and insisted that beside what she considered her deathbed we should be re-united."

"But did not papa," interrupted Lillian, "try to make you alter your determination? did he not ask what made you give him up?"

"No, he was too hurt and angry, and sent a short cold answer to my mother's letter. I never heard from or saw him, till we stood together beside Agatha's bed. We were soon married after that, and she recovered ; but she has remained in the same village, refusing many offers, always true to her first love, and watching, as I told you, my life, serving me whenever she could, and carrying, as she herself says, ever with her, 'a sad and sorrowful remembrance of the past, and a fruitless wish to expiate her fault.' God knows I have long ago forgiven her, but she says she can never forgive herself."

"Poor thing ! and have you seen her since your marriage?" asked Lillian.

"No, never ; my family left the place soon after my marriage, and I have never been there. I do not think she could ever have borne to see me the wife of the man she loved so dearly. Here are the girls."

And so the conversation was changed, and Lillian thought no more of Agatha Hepburn until she recorded the tale to her husband on her return home.

A happy evening when he and her father joined the party, concluded this her first visit to the old home since her marriage ; and she did not leave till it was arranged that they should come on the following week to spend a long day with her, and that Helen and Emily should come back with her on Christmas Day, after the general meeting of the family at Old Court, and remain with her for a few weeks.

On Sundays, ever since their marriage, an uncle of Leonard's had always dined with them. He had been unfortunate in business, fond of speculations which had always failed, and by degrees diminished his capital, until he was almost beggared ; and he might now be numbered amongst those unfortunates termed poor relations. He had little to recommend him in any way. A slight stroke of paralysis, occasioned by one of his severe losses, made him lame with one leg, and rendered one arm partially useless. He was tall, and very thin, with a sad, hopeless expression of face, which spoke of many years of bitter disappointments ; so that none could look on him without pity or with admiration. It quite spoilt

Sunday to Lillian, for she could not like him, and dreaded his visits ; but he was Leonard's uncle, the brother of her of whom he always spoke with such love and devotion—his widowed mother ; and so the little wife, with her true love, never let him know how unwelcome was her Sunday guest, but gave him cheerful, kindly, greeting always. She would have done so still more gladly, had she known what bright spots in his existence were these Sabbath days. He had always liked coming to his nephew in his dull lodgings ; but now, in his pretty orderly home, with that sweet, bright face to look at, those kindly, woman hands to take from him his poor old shabby great-coat and shiny hat, and lead him tenderly to the arm-chair beside the fire ; the well-served dinner at which her merry voice and pleasant chatter made music for him as he ate. It was indeed a happy day, a true Sabbath—rest from weariness and loneliness, and the sad thoughts of the dreary past—something bright which he could carry back with him into the dreary week, to make it gladder with its brightness. They dined on Sundays early. He liked it, and Rachel could then go to church. So, at one o'clock that Sunday after her visit to Old Court, Lillian heard the timid knock at the door, and went herself to admit the poor, bent,

miserable figure, his face blue and pinched with the cold north wind, to the warmth and comforts within.

"Here's uncle, Leonard dear," she said, throwing open the little drawing-room door, where Leonard, with his feet on the fender, and ensconced in an arm-chair, was reading the paper.

"All right," he said, jumping up. "Come along, old man, and have a warm. Sharpish wind this, isn't it? We shall have some snow now before Christmas."

"Feels like it, Leonard—feels like it, certainly," he answered, as he sat down in the offered chair, whilst Lillian, as usual, carried off his coat and hat.

"Yes, I like a white Christmas, it's so jolly," said Leonard, poking up the fire, and making the ruddy flame fly up the chimney.

"Yes, when you've got a Christmas dinner and a fire to warm you, Leonard."

"You have never wanted one yet, uncle," said Leonard, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder, "and you never shall whilst I have one to share with you."

"Thank you, thank you, lad; but living on charity is poor work at best—so many years—so many years that I've had to count my quarter's

money, and see if it will just last out till the next quarter ; so many years that my Christmas dinner has been given me like other paupers' ; so many years since I feasted others round my own table, and felt like a gentleman. I'm only a poor beggar now."

"Nonsense, nonsense, uncle ; you'll not be allowed to talk so when Lilly comes. Here she is."

"What is it ?" she asked ; "what am I not to allow uncle to do ?"

"Talk gloomily, and call himself hard names," answered Leonard.

"Certainly not. Why, uncle, what do you mean by it ?" she said, sitting down beside him, and playfully patting his hand, which was resting on his knee. "I wonder you dare to talk sadly in my house. Why, the very walls will frown on you. There are no gloomy faces here."

"No, because there is nothing to make them so. Have creditors at your door all day, whom you cannot satisfy ; a sick wife, without common comforts ; children crying for food—let the memory of all this haunt you in after years, day by day, night after night, and see then whether gloomy faces will not replace your bright ones."

"True, dear uncle, such sorrows are enough to

send away smiles and cheerfulness, I admit ; but when you are here, I want you to try and banish all such sad recollections."

"I know, I know ; you are very kind, both of you ; but kindness comes too late now."

"Have you heard from my mother lately ?" said Leonard, anxious to change the current of his thoughts.

"No, not for some time ; have you ?"

"Yes ; I had a letter yesterday. I am in hopes to coax the old lady to town for Christmas."

"Ah ! do ; I should like to see her, and it will do her good. Not that she's lonely or dull ; she never is."

"Nor never was, uncle. I don't believe the dear old dame knows the meaning of the words."

"How I should like to know her !" said Lillian. "I should love *your* mother, darling," she continued, in a low voice, gliding her hand into her husband's as she spoke.

"I believe you would, Lilly dear, for she's the jolliest, kindest, best old body in the world."

"I like her letters, and I am sure I should like her. We must write a joint letter, and make her come ; but where shall we sleep her, if I have Helen and Emily, by the by."

"Oh, I must get her a bed close by. Perhaps there may be a bed at Miss Lawson's Ivy Lodge; she only has two rooms, and it's a nice, quiet cottage."

"Ah! that would be very pleasant; but I should send the girls there, not *your* mother."

"Well, there's time enough for that to be settled when we know if she will come."

"True, dearest, there will be."

The door at this moment opened very wide, and Rachel announced, in loud tones, "Dinner's on the table."

Leonard smiled as he rose, and said, "Why, my dear, your servant is improving. Come, uncle, take Lilly."

"Well, it is an improvement on her first manner of putting her head in at the door, and saying, 'You can have your dinner now, ma'am,' is it not?" said Lilly, as she went in to dinner.

"Most unquestionably—I mean it, really. She is greatly improved in everything; she's getting a first-rate cook."

And then Leonard told his uncle some anecdotes of Rachel's first mistakes, and how Lilly had taught and improved her; and so chatting gaily, the dinner was eaten and enjoyed, and then the two gentlemen

smoked, and Lilly sat beside them on a stool at her husband's feet until the afternoon service hour; then the three together went to church, exchanging kindly greetings with Miss Simmonds, whom they met in the churchyard; and then home to a quiet tea. After which, poor old uncle Pritchard returned to his dreary lodgings, Leonard walking to the top of the road to see him safe into the omnibus.

The next day they were to go to Mrs. De Courcy's. Lilly dreaded it, and was as near being cross as her happy nature would let her be, especially as Leonard appeared to enjoy the idea of it.

"What am I to wear?" she said; "nothing I have, can come up to Mrs. De Courcy's grandeur."

"There is no reason that it should, love," said Leonard; "your pretty, simple style suits you much better. Wear your pink muslin, with the leaves in your hair, with all that spangly stuff on them."

"You mean my pink crape, with fern-leaves and dew-drops, I suppose, you silly old boy," said Lilly, laughing in spite of herself.

"Yes, that's it. I know what I mean, and you know what I mean; so, what does it signify what say. Wear that, I never saw you look nicer in anything."

"Very well; oh, dear! I wish I was home again."

"Silly little woman, do not get into the way of taking prejudices; make friends and keep them. I'm off now, good-bye, darling; I shall be home in good time." And he kissed his little wife and started to his business, returning as he promised in good time to dress.

"Look here, pet," he said while they were dressing, tossing a fourpenny piece to Lillian, "put that away for me; I shall give you another some day."

"What are you going to do, then?" said Lillian, laughing; "make a collection of fourpenny pieces?"

"No, the coin may not always be a fourpenny piece; the fact is, I am adopting a new method of saving money, and that is my first deposit."

"What is the principle?" asked Lillian, as she locked up the little coin in her dressing case.

"Well, you see, I intend, whenever I am about to do anything that costs money, and I alter my mind and don't do it, to save the money I should have spent, do you see? For instance, I was coming home in the omnibus to-night, and I walked instead, so there's the money my ride would have cost."

"Well, that is an amusing idea," answered Lillian; "do you mean to do this always?"

"Yes, always, and look at the money every New Year's Day; and another plan, Lilly, I have been thinking of, whenever we draw a bottle of wine, to put away the money in a box that that bottle cost, so that when one dozen is drank out, there will be all the money to pay the bill, ready."

"If we have the courage to keep it there, you mean."

"Well, yes, of course, but then we must; it shall be a regular money-box, not one easily got at, you know. You look doubtful; you leave it to me—you'll see I'll do it. You shall take care of the 'second thoughts' saving fund, and I'll manage the wine-bill; but come, little woman, are you ready? we must be going."

"Oh, yes! it's very dreadful; I shall be so glad to get away; you won't stay late, will you, dear?"

"Oh! pray, Lillian, do not be so silly; what can there be objectionable in going to the house of a most delightful woman, to meet a few agreeable people? do not make yourself absurd."

Lilly was silent; it was the first cross word Leonard had ever said to her. She felt silence was then her best resource, so not a word was uttered between

them until they reached Mrs. De Courcy's door, and then Leonard said, as the door opened, "Trot in, darling," in the old voice of kindness, sending Lilly into the brilliantly-lighted and elegantly-furnished room with a happier heart than she would have had if the cross tone had alone been ringing in her ears. Mrs. De Courcy advanced to meet them with her most winning smile.

"How nice of you to come; and I fear I have a very dull evening for you, all my best people have disappointed me, and particularly the gentleman I wanted you to meet; but come to the fire, it is so cold." And she led Lillian to a luxurious arm-chair near a brightly burning fire, and placing in her hand a feather screen to protect "*that* complexion," as she said, from being injured, she moved away to receive other guests, and then Lillian heard a gentle voice behind her say—

"Dear Mrs. Gray, how good of you to come." Lilly turned and saw Beatrice, her sweet face bright with pleasure. Lilly shook her cordially by the hand and said—

"Come and sit here beside me."

"I don't know whether mamma will want me," she answered hesitatingly.

"Oh, no? not just now, she is busy receiving

her guests ; sit here a little while and tell me who they all are, for I know no one ; who is that now just coming in ?”

“That is Mr. Brandleth Tomlinson, a great author ; he’s written heaps of things I believe.”

“And that lady, is she his wife ?”

“Oh, no ! her name is Atkinson ; I don’t like her at all ; but she’s a great favourite of mamma’s, she always asks her ; she says she sings so beautifully, but I can’t bear her singing, then I know I am no judge.”

“Your mother said she only expected a gentleman and his daughter, quite in a friendly way.”

“Oh ! mamma calls this quite in a friendly way ; we have these sort of evenings once a week and sometimes oftener ; they are all intimate friends of mamma’s. Ah ! here is dear Mr. Broughton—he’ll soon find me out ;” and true enough, the moment he had shaken hands with Mrs. De Courcy, his eyes wandered round the room until they fell on Beatrice, and then he crossed immediately to her, and drawing a chair beside her appeared to have settled himself to his entire satisfaction ; but he was soon discomfited, for Mrs. De Courcy beckoned Beatrice away in a few moments, and seated her by the side of a

thin, pale, miserable-looking girl who had come with Mrs. Atkinson.

"Now that's too bad, Mrs. Gray, isn't it? I came to have a chat with my little pet, and she's carried off directly," said Mr. Broughton.

"Yes, and she would much have preferred staying here; but I fear poor little Beatrice is seldom allowed to do as she likes," answered Lillian.

"Ah! well, perhaps it's better for young folks not to have too much of their own way. I am glad to see you here to-night; I want to speak to your husband, and I will take this opportunity, as I see he is not engaged in conversation with any one else."

And so Mr. Broughton moved away, and Lillian was left to watch at her ease the numerous guests who soon filled the small room, to her greater amusement than talking, for she had led such a quiet life, and been so little in what is called "society," that the present party was quite a novelty. She perceived that there were [more gentlemen than ladies, and that all bore some peculiar character which bespoke them "lions." She was struck, too, with the ease of their manners, the way in which the conversation became at once general and full of point and fun, no long pause in which each person seemed to be

wondering what they should say next; but a continual flow of wit and repartee, only lulled by an occasional song, either from Mrs. De Courcy or Mrs. Atkinson (whose singing Lillian quite agreed with Beatrice in not liking), the performance followed by no meaningless formal "thank you," but warm applause, and a discussion on the merits of the song, and the composer, showing a real interest and love for music, which Lillian thought must make it a real pleasure to sing to such an audience; yet, when after a few animated words with Leonard, Mrs. De Courcy came to her and said—

"My dear Mrs. Gray, your husband tells me you sing delightfully; do give us one song," she felt terribly alarmed and begged earnestly to be excused, but Leonard following up the request with "Yes, yes, do your best, Lillian," and a whispered "there will be nothing in the evening like it to *me*," decided her in acquiescing; and she went to the piano and sang till she excelled herself, the rapturous applause which succeeded the first verse giving her greater courage and inspiration; of course she was urged to sing again, and again, and when Leonard came and whispered to her that it was nearly one o'clock, she could scarcely believe they had been there an hour, and willingly admitted to

Leonard on her return, that she had had a delightful evening. "And it cannot be very expensive to her, Leonard, either, for there was only the lightest refreshment."

"No, that is what she says, she only professes to give tea. I think such evenings are most enjoyable, and some day I hope to be in a position to give such pleasant entertainments. We must have the De Courcys to tea some evening in a quiet way, and Mr. Broughton."

"Oh! dear Leonard, no; how absurd it would be here; and to ask Mr. Broughton all the way from Blackheath to tea! we could not do such a thing."

"Mrs. De Courcy said she should like it; I always believe people until I find them false, and I shall certainly say we shall be happy to see them if they like to come. I believe Mr. Broughton would like it too—rich as he is, his life is not very cheerful; and we must not begin life, darling, with being unsociable or inhospitable; we need make no pretensions or go farther than our means allow; but if people will share what we have, we ought to give them a hearty welcome."

"As you please, dear, you are master; I am only anxious not to be tempted into expenses we cannot keep up."

“You are quite right, Lilly ; we must keep within bounds, I know ; but asking a neighbour to tea, I think we *can* manage.”

Lilly said no more, but she felt worried, for she thought the De Courcys and Mr. Broughton were people who expected better entertainment than she could afford to give them, and that though he did say so she was sure Leonard would not be satisfied to give them only tea ; he would want the elegances that he had seen at Mrs. De Courcy’s, which though not seriously expensive, would add to their weekly expenditure in a way she knew he little contemplated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.

THE months had passed away, and winter had crept silently upon them with its warning of short days and colder winds, and "the white Christmas," which Leonard had called so enjoyable, he might revel in, for a thick snow covered everything, and the cold was intense. Poor "froze-out gardeners" uttered their complaints in the streets, their idle spades across their shoulders, and little boys' shrill voices woke the late sleepers with "Sweep before your door, ma'am." The shops were all brilliant with holly and other Christmas decorations, and so full, that extra hands were needed to serve the customers.

Lilly in her little home was busy, too, making arrangements for her visitors, decorating her rooms with pretty devices in leaves and holly, trying her hand at the concoction of mince meat, and seeing how much they could afford to do for the poor.

She had found out the poor office-clerk, as she wished to do; as she and her husband were to go on Christmas-eve, and stay until the day after Christmas-day with Mr. and Mrs. Leigh, she thought they could afford dinner to him and the Buntings; she had also gone to call on dear old Miss Simmonds, to discover if she was to pass a happy Christmas, and in case of finding the reverse, to ask her to accompany them to Old Court; but the good old lady said she was going as usual to her dear old friend, who never forgot her, and with whom she had always passed Christmas for many years. So satisfied about these persons, in whom she felt such interest, good little Lillian jumped into the fly which was to carry her to her old home, with her husband and old Mrs. Gray (who had been tempted from her seclusion to join the party), looking bright as the sun which gleamed on the frozen snow, and giving as good cheer to those who looked on it.

They had the merriest of Christmas-days, even poor Uncle Pritchard being fain to laugh at the fun; and the drive home was as merry as any part of it, Helen and Emily being in such delight at this their first visit to "dear Lilly," and Mrs. Gray telling such funny tales of Leonard's childhood, and of the

old Christmas gambols she could recollect in her young days, that they scarcely ceased laughing until they reached home. There they had a little spiced wine all together by the bright fire which Rachel had ready for them; and then Leonard took the girls to Ivy Cottage, where he had hired a bed-room for them, as Lilly would not hear of Mrs. Gray being sent out to sleep; and Lilly took her to her room to see that everything was right and comfortable for her, receiving an affectionate kiss in return from the dear old lady, whom Lilly was as much pleased with as she had anticipated.

"Mother, I've come for a good-night kiss," said Leonard, a few moments after, tapping at her door.

"All right, my boy, come in. I was sitting down by the fire your little wife has provided for me, thinking——"

"Not thinking that you don't like the said little wife, I hope?"

"Quite the reverse, my dear Leonard. I'm enchanted with her. She is a first-rate little body, I can see—gentle and lady-like without being insipid; affectionate and attentive without being intrusive; and though last not least, even in my estimation, remarkably pretty."

Leonard looked very satisfied as he kissed his mother, perhaps the more tenderly for thus appreciating his wife.

"It is generally supposed to be an impossible task to please sisters and mothers-in-law," he said; "and I must own I have felt very curious to know your opinion."

"I should not have given an unfavourable one even if I had had one, now you are married; but it is much pleasanter to be able to say heartily and sincerely as I do, 'I like your wife, and am pleased to call her daughter.'"

"Thank you, dear mother; I am most glad to hear you say so; and now good-night, and God bless you."

During this conversation Lilly had been talking to Rachel, and inquiring how she had passed her Christmas-day.

"Oh! very nice, ma'am, thank you; poor Anna Maria," said she, "never had been so happy in all her life. We did just enjoy ourselves; and poor Bobby, oh! he did eat a sight of dinner."

"Did you dine with them or they with you?"

"Well, ma'am, as you was so good as to give me my choice, I went home. I locked up all safe, and Anna Maria and me went off as soon as we

comed out of church, and got home again by five o'clock to tea. And I did find the good of lighting the fires at the top, ma'am, like you showed me,* for when we got home there was a lovely fire not gone out a bit."

"You did not like the idea of it at first, did you, Rachel?"

"No, mum, I did not a bit; it seemed such a queer way to go to work; but I know now I've found the valley of it, and in coals it's a wonderful save to be sure. Well, then, we had a comfortable tea and a nice bit of supper, and I made our beer hot with some ginger and sugar in it, and we drank your health and master's, and, lor! we was happy."

"I am very glad of it, and poor Anna Maria knows why we try to be joyful and show kindness one to another at Christmas more than any other season now."

"Yes, mum, thanks to you. I'm sure it was beautiful to hear her talk and tell me all you'd said about it. Oh! she does just love you, ma'am."

"I'm very much obliged to her, Rachel. I like to be loved; but now good-night, for here comes your master."

* *Vide* "Family Save All."

“Good-night, ma’am, and thank you kindly.”

And so ended Lillian’s first Christmas-day in her wedded home.

The next morning a very merry party sat at breakfast, making the little house ring with laughter. Anna Maria was engaged for the week to assist Rachel, as three more persons in the house made a difference to her work, and she would not hear of being paid, as she said that Mrs. Gray had been so kind she was only too glad to be of use; and, moreover, it was treat enough to be rid of the “drefful ’eavy ’ead” for a week; so a happier, merrier, or more contented little household could not be than that assembled in Leonard Gray’s cottage, or, as Harry termed it, “suburban villa,” on that same 26th day of December.

“Here, my darling,” said Leonard, when he came back that evening, “there’s some more ‘second thoughts’ money for you. I walked home, and I resisted oysters for lunch,” and he tossed eighteenpence across the table to her; “we shall have a fine purse by next New Year’s-day.”

“Next New Year’s-day, dear?”

“I don’t mean this one that is just coming, of course. I mean the one after.”

“Oh, yes, I see. Mamma, I think I ought to

explain what this means," said Lilly, turning to Mrs. Gray, who had lain down her knitting, and was listening, with a somewhat puzzled look, to this conversation. She was greatly amused at the idea, and, wishing to encourage any economical habits she said—

"Well, if I am alive on New Year's-day twelve-month, I will put interest to the sum you have saved at the rate of twenty-five per cent. I have great respect for an attempt to save money when it is not at the expense of liberality or charity."

"Or hospitality, eh! mother. I know a little woman who thinks it very extravagant to ask a neighbour to tea."

"Oh, Leonard! that is an exaggeration. I would be delighted to ask Miss Simmonds to tea, and am going to do so this very afternoon."

"Then it is only *my* friends you don't like to ask."

"Leonard, that is very naughty," and Lillian looked reproachfully at him.

"Dear little woman," he said, rising and kissing her, "I see a whole nest of Uncle Pritchards and dear old mothers in your eyes; but I did not say relations, I said friends. The fact is, mother dear," he continued, turning to Mrs. Gray, "I have taken

a great fancy to a lady whom we met at Mr. Broughton's, and I want him and this lady to come and have a quiet cup of tea with us, and my good little wife here thinks it a ruinous proceeding."

"Now let me speak, mamma dear," said Lillian. "The fact is, this Mrs. De Courcy is an elegant, fashionable woman, who, though not rich, gives agreeable evenings to a large number of literary people; do you think she would like to come into our little bit of a place to tea with us? I want Leonard to wait until he is rich, and then he can give elegant little dinners, or *soirées*, or what he likes."

"Well, I think Lilly only says what is reasonable, my boy, I own," answered Mrs. Gray. "This lady may strive to be civil and ask you to her evenings, but it is quite a question whether she would be pleased to be asked to a quiet little tea in return, with no inducement but your two selves."

"She said she should, mother, and I always like to believe people till I find them unworthy of belief. If we ask her, and she does not come, I shall know she does not deserve credit for honesty; but I should like to try her."

"Then ask her, Lilly dear, I would, and see if Leonard is right."

"And literally provide tea and coffee, and nothing else?" said Lilly.

"Yes, nothing else," said Leonard.

"Very well; what day?"

"Oh, I leave that to you. Some day before my mother goes."

"Thursday, shall we say then? for I must be home on Saturday," said Mrs. Gray. And so it was settled for Thursday.

The girls thought it would be great fun. They should see this wonderful woman of whom they had heard so much, and the Beautiful Beatrice. This, and Mrs. Gray's cheerful view of the matter, was comforting to poor little Lilly, who, it must be owned, was somewhat vexed, and wrote the note with a rather ill grace, asking them to tea, "literally tea"; but it was most cordially answered as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. GRAY,—We shall be charmed! Poor little Beatrice will count the minutes. She has lost her heart to you; and she goes out so seldom! It is so kind of you to have something I can bring her to, as this transition age is so wretched for girls.—Yours most truly,

"A. DE COURCY."

Lillian handed the note to Leonard on his return, and he said—

"There, I told you so ; and I have asked Mr. Broughton, and he is coming too, and quite pleased to do so. He has given me a draft to-day for my work, and I paid at once half of it into the bank with your money ; so you see, dearie, we shall soon have lots of little nest-eggs. Don't look so serious, love. Is Thursday weighing on your mind ?"

"I think it is, rather," said Lilly, with a faint effort at a smile.

"Well, I think that's very silly, then."

"A first party is a somewhat formidable affair to a young housekeeper," said Mrs. Gray, coming to the rescue, as she always did. "Lilly cannot help being anxious ; but she will find it pass off so pleasantly that she will be ready for a tea-party once a week, if you like, afterwards, I know. I can well remember your poor dear father horrifying me by inviting our good old dean to dine when we had been married only a few months. I knew next to nothing of housekeeping, for I was very young, and my elder sisters had been helping my mother, so they had had all the learning. What to order for dinner, I could not think. I had a very cross old cook, whom my mother had persuaded us to hire because she thought she would aid my inexperience ; and so I went to her, full of trouble, to help me out

of my difficulties, but to my horror and astonishment she seated herself on a chair, and said, 'No; that I can't and *won't* do—cook for a dean! No; I'm obliged to you—not I.'

" 'But, cook,' I urged, 'what am I to do? Your master's asked him, and he must have some dinner.'

" 'Well, he's got a better dinner at home than he's like to get here, so let him stay there and eat it.'

" 'Nonsense, cook; I can't tell him that, and your master will be in a dreadful way,' I said. 'Do, like a good body, be reasonable, and let you and I think of something nice to give him.'

" 'What I might think nice, and he might think nice, may be very different. I likes beefsteak and onions, and pork and greens. No, ma'am,' she said, rising and banging her hand down on the kitchen table, 'as sure as my name's Ruth Martyn, and that I stands here before you, I'll cook no dinner for a dean.'"

" 'Oh! mamma dear, what did you do?' asked Lillian, entirely forgetting her own little domestic troubles in this amusing account of her mother-in-law's.

" 'Well, my dear, I'm afraid I burst out crying. I had been worried enough at the thought myself,

and now to find this fresh and unexpected difficulty arise was too much for me, but my tears had no more effect than my entreaties, and I was obliged to wait till Mr. Gray came in, and tell him the tale. He was very angry, and said he should discharge her at once, and get a dinner for the dean from the pastrycook's. Accordingly Ruth Martyn was paid and discharged, and I was left with my young housemaid to make arrangements for the dinner—Mr. Gray refusing to see there could be any further difficulty remaining, if the dinner was all to come in from the pastrycook's. Well, the dean came, a charming man he was. I think he saw my painful nervousness. I could eat nothing; I was far too anxious. But he talked, and laughed, and told anecdotes, and praised everything, till I began to forget my worries listening to him; and the only disaster which happened, causing a frown from Mr. Gray, was that I had forgotten to have finger-glasses set for dessert."

"There, Lillian," said Leonard, "that is a much worse trouble than I am giving you. So cheer up, little woman, and we will have the most successful tea-party ever known."

"I long for Thursday," said Helen, who, with her sister, had been amused listeners to Mrs. Gray's tale.

"Yes," said Emily, "so do I. It will be such fun to see dear Lilly giving a party, so often as we've played at it at home with our little dinner and tea things, dressed up in some old finery of mamma's."

"Yes, and if more pains and interest were taken by grown-up people in little children's amusements," said Mrs. Gray, "they might really learn a great deal, and giving a party in earnest, come much easier to them when they possess homes of their own. I am sure my dear mother's instructions how to nurse and tend my doll, were a great assistance to me when I had a baby of my own; for she always insisted on its being used like a baby, and I had to put it to bed, and get it up at regular times, and wash and dress it like an infant. I own I was glad when it was short-coated, for I greatly disliked the necessity of keeping it in the recumbent posture whilst it was in long clothes."

"Why was it not to be set up, Mrs. Gray?" asked Helen.

"Because the back of a young child is not strong enough to support itself in a sitting posture, and it makes their eyes start also; this was duly explained to me by my mother, and for worlds I would not have endangered the beautiful blue eyes of my waxen favourite."

Dinner stopped the conversation for the time, and at half-past seven Miss Simmonds arrived, according to Lilly's invitation on the previous day.

Thursday, the important Thursday, came at last; and all the morning Helen and Emily busied themselves in assisting Lilly with arrangements for the evening. The tea-service, which had been one of their wedding presents, was got out from its box to make its first appearance, and the lovely set of china tea things, a wedding gift which had never been allowed before to see the light, or submitted to Rachel's tender mercies. With many injunctions they were confided to her now, and then a serious and important conversation took place as to whether they should make tea in the room, or have it handed; finally decided by a majority of votes in favour of "made in the room," as less pretentious. Helen agreed to preside at it, and so the silver kettle was produced also, which had been Mr. Broughton's wedding gift to Leonard.

At seven o'clock the first knock was heard, and Rachel in a new muslin apron and new cap for the occasion, threw open the drawing-room door, and announced Mrs. and Miss De Courcy and Mr. Broughton; he had called for them and brought them in his brougham.

Poor little Lillian's heart began to beat, but she rose with the quiet grace natural to her, and received her guests as though she had always been used to it. Mrs. De Courcy was dressed in black velvet, with a high, plain body, a small collar of Spanish point round the neck, fastened by a brooch of corals, and diamonds. A small square of the same lace was fastened by pins on her head to match the brooch. Beatrice wore a silk skirt of a large pattern, which had evidently been her mother's, and a washed muslin body, which fitted her very badly ; but her cheeks were flushed with pleasure, and she looked so lovely that the attention was attracted from the dress, and left in contemplation of the sweet face above it.

"How nice and friendly this is of you, dear Mrs. Gray," were Mrs. De Courcy's first words ; "this is what I like—no ceremony. I have jumped up from my own dinner table just as I was, and should have walked round here but for kind Mr. Broughton who called for us in his brougham ;" and then she seated herself by old Mrs. Gray, and talked to her as pleasantly and kindly as though she had known her all her life, and when tea was ended pressed Lillian to sing, and sang herself, and, in short, was as cheering and fascinating as she could be. Beatrice sat

between the two girls, and they whispered and laughed as many young girls will, and at the end of the evening had cemented the most intense friendship, and called each other "dear," and "darling," as though it were impossible that anything or anybody could be dearer to them than each other. Of course when the guests were gone, the evening was talked over, and Mrs. Gray was rapturous in her praise of Mrs. De Courcy. Lillian could not but admit she had been most agreeable, but the first impression of dislike still remained; but Leonard kissed her, and thanked her for her efforts to make the evening pleasant, assuring her she had fully succeeded. So she went to bed much happier than she had risen on that day of her first tea-party. The girls were unanimous in their admiration of Beatrice, and said she had told them she should beg her mother to let them spend the day with her soon. Mrs. Gray left the young couple on the following Saturday, having, as she assured them, had a most happy visit, and carrying away with her a pleasant conviction of her son's happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LITTLE STRANGER.

THE winter passed merrily away. Lilly's guests were all gone, and the buds of lilac, laburnum, flowering-currant, and almond, were beginning to give fair promise of coming spring in Lillian's little garden. By the time large bunches of the sweet lilac scented the rooms through the open windows, and the long pendants of laburnum, like golden ear-rings, gleamed amongst the other trees, and the pretty crimson bunches of the flowering-currant blended its colours with crocuses, primroses, and hepaticas, a little blossom, fairer, brighter, dearer than these all to Lillian, lay nestled beside her—a little girl—a second Lillian for Leonard to love. It must be owned he was not as charmed with this addition to his household as Lillian was herself, or as she hoped he would be; but he assured her he should love it very much when it had attained some personality, and could speak and know people, and

not as now, swaddled up in clothes, looking like every other baby in the world.

Of course, the nurse and Lillian declared it was very like him ; but he said it might be like what he was at the same age, but he would not believe there was a shade of likeness now.

Naturally Mrs. Leigh was in attendance on the new grandchild, and very much charmed with it. "Somehow, her daughter's child seemed dearer to her than her son's," she said ; so that it added greatly to Lillian's delight to see her mother with the child in her arms, "cooing" to it, and looking at it so lovingly, that altogether those few first weeks of her child's life were very happy ones, only marred (for all human happiness must have a slight shadow of the earth on it) by the little she saw of her husband. He would just run up when he returned from business, and kiss her before his dinner ; and then, after staying there, perhaps, for five minutes' chatting, say he should stroll out with his pipe till bed-time, for it was wretched in-doors without her ; so that Lillian longed to be once more downstairs about her usual avocations. She had been most careful in her selection of a nurse, by her mother's express desire, paying more than might at first sight have been thought prudent.

But Mrs. Leigh had told her that the good old saying of "a stitch in time saves nine," might find application as much in this instance as in many others, for the life of mother and child had been too often sacrificed through the stupidity and ignorance of a so-called nurse; the generality undertaking this office when past all other employment, without a single grain of necessary information, or the smallest experience. "Better far, my dear," Mrs. Leigh had said, "restrict your baby's wardrobe, and not spend an absurd sum on robes, and hoods, and cloaks, which, after all, the little thing may not live to wear, and pay a good price to have yourself and child carefully and judiciously attended. These first four weeks of the little one's life are more important than many think, and a thoroughly good nurse will in that time get the baby into good habits, and teach them to you, so that you will find the benefit of them for the rest of your married life. I was blessed in my nurse—may you be also in yours. She was like a mother to me, and I followed to the letter all her good advice, being rewarded by the comparatively little trouble my family cost me. 'Never use your child like a toy,' she used to say; 'the young mothers are so apt to do so; they will have their children up from the cot, awake or

asleep, to show to people, and keep them up in the evening, because the husband has been out all day, and wants to see them; the end of which is, that you have a restless, wakeful child, who will neither thrive itself, nor allow its mother and nurse a moment's peace.' My nurse, as the clock struck five, would have the infant undressed, and laid in its bassinette, from whence it was never taken till it was time to feed it for the last thing; consequently, when she was gone, the nursemaid had quiet, long evenings, in which she could work; and you would not have known, after seven in the evening, when I had four of you, that there was a child in the house. The method of feeding was equally judicious. Helen and Emily were brought up by hand; and to her, under Providence, I am indebted for their health and strength. 'Follow nature, my dear,' she would say, 'and then you can never go wrong; give them food as similar as possible to that which nature supplies—nothing that wants masticating, until they have teeth to masticate with; and keep them very warm, for nature teaches us that warmth is nourishment to all young things. Let them sleep all they will; and when you see them stretch, and eagerly take their food when they wake, you may be sure they have

not had one moment's too much sleep.' Helen sometimes would not wake for eight hours at a stretch."

All this instruction Lilly carefully listened to, and hoped to profit by; and luckily succeeding in securing the services of an excellent nurse, with ideas exactly similar to those so constantly instilled into her, everything was going on as she could wish, and her little darling growing and thriving beautifully.

One day, when baby was nearly a fortnight old, and that delightful event was being talked of, "coming downstairs in the drawing-room," Leonard came to Lillian's room, as usual after his dinner, and said—

"I saw Mrs. De Courcy, Lilly, to-day; she asked most kindly after you, and said, as it must be terribly dull for me without you, I had better come in and see her; so I'm going this evening."

"Very well, dear," said Lilly, in not a very pleasant tone; for she did not like his going there, to see any one whom she disliked so much herself, although she felt she ought not to be so selfish as to ask him not to go, when he had so little now to amuse him.

He did not perceive that her manner implied

dissatisfaction, so, with another kiss, and an injunction to "nurse" to make haste and let the little "missis" get downstairs, or he should run away, he took his way to Mrs. De Courcy's.

Up to this time Lilly had been very patient, but now she was most anxious to get down, and wearied nurse and her mother with her importunity, until they consented she should go down on the Sunday to tea. It was to be a surprise to Leonard whilst he was at the afternoon service. She was to be placed on the drawing-room sofa, ready to receive him. A very pleasant surprise she would have been to any one, for she looked lovely in the prettiest of white wrapping gowns, composed of Mull muslin, trimmed with lace, and fastened down the front with bows of blue riband; a little cap trimmed with the same colour, covering, but not concealing, her sunny-brown hair; slippers of quilted blue silk encasing her dainty little feet—the whole toilet made and presented to her by her loving and admiring sisters, who were sure Lilly would look in it "like a little angel." Close to the couch was placed baby, in its bassinette, and a small table, on which was a vase of pretty spring flowers and some books. A radiant smile of pleasure illumined Lillian's face, as she gazed round at

her pretty little drawing-room ; a feeling of gratitude and thankfulness to the Giver of all good, too deep for words, gave itself utterance only in that smile, and the close pressure of her mother's hand resting in hers.

"To think it is my own, my very own baby, mamma dear," at length she said ; "I seem only just beginning to realize it ; it's been like a dream till I see it down here in this room. Little darling ; how lovely she looks !"

"Yes, your very own, my child ; and yet you must never forget that He who gave it you will demand it again. It is a grave and serious charge, that little mortal soul. Begin at once to train it for its promised inheritance. Let no neglect or fault of yours make it forfeit that."

"I am so afraid about that, mamma dear. I fear I am not good enough to make her good. It seems to me that those who have children should never say or do a wrong thing again themselves—and yet that is impossible."

"Impossible to be quite perfect, dear, certainly, but not impossible to exercise that self-control which shall enable you to show no evil tempers before your child—quite possible to control words and actions, and overcome bad habits, and institute

new and good ones, so as not only to be a good example to your little one, but improve your own character. I daresay you wondered when I said, 'begin at once;' but I meant it. A pleasant, smiling face for a baby to look up into is its first lesson in good temper, and will naturally assist the child in establishing a cheerful, happy temper of its own. Smiles and laughter are very infectious, and so, too, are tears. I have known an infant, before it could speak, cry, because its mother did, simply, of course, from the expression of her face. It is the only way they can be taught at first; and it is wonderful how soon they can distinguish between a pleasant and angry expression, and how soon they learn the meaning of 'No.' You, as a small child, had an extraordinary love for coals, and as soon as you could crawl you made your way to the scuttle; but 'No, baby,' emphatically uttered, with a grave face and shake of the head, soon made you understand it was not to be, and you would content yourself with crawling to the scuttle and bowing to it, occasionally stretching out one little hand, and quickly withdrawing it with a sly glance at me. Now," continued Mrs. Leigh, "what is that little, anxious gaze directed to the window for so constantly?"

"I was watching for Leonard," said Lillian, smiling and blushing as she answered.

"I thought you were. Well, he will be here in a moment; and here comes nurse with something to amuse you until your husband arrives."

While Lillian was eating the jelly which the attentive nurse had brought her, Rachel entered with a three-cornered note for her mistress, and giving a loving glance at the sleeping baby, and saying, "There ain't no answer, ma'am," she left Lilly to the perusal of the note, which elicited an exclamation of—

"Oh, mamma dear, here's a disappointment!" and she handed the note to her mother with something very like tears glistening in her pretty eyes.

Mrs. Leigh read it. It was a few lines from Leonard:—

"DARLING,—Mrs. De Courcy waylaid me coming from church, and insisted on my dining with her, as Mr. Broughton is coming. I shall not be late, love, and if you are not asleep, will take a peep at you and the tiny one on my return.

"Your loving LEONARD."

"Well, that is rather disappointing, certainly,"

said her mother ; " and I am sure he will be equally disappointed when he finds you have been downstairs, and he has not been at home. We shall have your father over, though, I expect, presently, for I told him you were coming down ; so we shall be able to amuse ourselves, and we will scold Leonard well when he comes home."

Lillian made no answer ; a choking sensation in her throat kept her silent. She would have been disappointed any way, but she was vexed as well now to know he was at Mrs. De Courcy's. Her father luckily arrived a short time after, and that somewhat rallied her ; for there was the baby to show, and the christening to arrange about. Helen and Emily were to be godmothers, and Harry god-papa ; and talking of all this passed the time until bed-time, and Mr. Leigh had to go. Of course Lilly kept awake until Leonard came ; but she said she was tired, and kissed him coolly for the first time in her life, and then cried herself to sleep because she had done so.

The next morning Mrs. Leigh told him, at breakfast, what he had missed by not returning, and how disappointed Lilly was. He seemed genuinely sorry, and though he was rather late, went upstairs to her room before going to his office, to tell her how

grieved he was. His tenderness and expressions of affection quite consoled her, and she promised to be in the drawing-room to receive him on his return from town.

In the course of the day Rachel came up to know if Anna Maria might see the baby and "missus." This favour was accorded, and Anna Maria was admitted.

"I am just glad to see you, ma'am," she said. "I've been a-working so hard at my learning ever since I was here last, but I don't seem to get on alone like I does with you."

"Well, I shall soon be able to take you again now, Anna; and now, what do you think of baby?" asked Lillian.

"Well, it don't look a very 'eavy-'eaded one, certainly. I think I'd as soon nuss that as any baby I ever see."

Lillian knew this was as great praise as Anna could accord to any child; and with a kindly smile she proceeded to ask her after her family, and request that her mother would bring up poor little Bobby to be examined by Mrs. Leigh.

"Yes, ma'am; mother will be glad to, for he don't get no better, and it's my belief as he never won't."

"What's the matter with the child?" asked Mrs. Leigh.

"Well, ma'am, I don't know," said Anna Maria, turning with a curtsy to Mrs. Leigh; "but he's got such a drefful large 'ead, and such drefful little legs, and he's a-turned of two, and can't run bit."

"Poor little man, I fear he is past my skill; but if you will bring him to-morrow, I will see what I can do."

"Thank you, ma'am; and please, ma'am," said Anna Maria, turning to Lillian, "shall I be wanted any more this week, for mother's got a wash, and wants me?"

"No, Anna, I think Rachel can manage now very well. I shall want you the day of the christening; and as I expect you to look very bright and smart for the occasion, I shall give you a cap with white ribands, and a white muslin apron to wear. You shall have them to-morrow, when you bring Bobby."

"Oh, thank you, ma'am very much; I'll be sure to come. Rachel will tell me which day."

"Oh, yes; you shall be duly told which day;" and with several more curtseys and thanks, the little body departed.

Leonard, full of penitence for having caused Lilly to shed one tear, had been kindness and attention itself ever since—had brought her a beautiful brooch, and petted her to her heart's content; so that Lillian's brightness and cheerfulness all returned. She forgot all about Mrs. De Courcy, and was happier, as she said, than she had ever been in her life. The christening passed over quietly and happily, and the little one began its conflict with the world with the names of Ethel Helen. Mrs. Leigh had returned home, and all things had resumed their natural course at the little cottage, save that nurse—"dear" nurse, as Lilly had learned to call her—remained, because as yet the young mother could not suit herself with a nursemaid. She was very particular, it is true; but could she, as she said, be too particular in the choice of one who was to have the care of her treasure? She did not think it right to give herself up to it, and so sacrifice her husband's comfort; so she wanted some one whom she could trust with the child when she was out with him.

At length, one morning a young woman arrived, saying she wished to speak to Mrs. Gray. She had come from Miss Simmonds. She was admitted at once, and a sweet, bright, clean-looking girl stood

before Lilly, who was at once charmed with her appearance, and also with the look of love and admiration she cast at the baby lying in its mother's lap.

"You have come after my nursemaid's place?" said Lilly, motioning the young girl to a chair.

"Yes, ma'am ; Miss Simmonds sent me."

"Are you fond of children?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, so very, very fond of them."

"Well, that is a great thing in your favour ; but you look very young."

"I am young, ma'am ; but mother says I shall mend of that," answered the young girl, with a smile.

"That is true, certainly ; but have you ever had a child to nurse or do for?"

"Mother's children, ma'am ; and I have been under-nurse for three months at Mrs. Wayland's ; but it was such a dreadful hard place that I could not stop in it, and Miss Simmonds advised me to come and try for this."

"How many children had Mrs. Wayland?"

"Five, ma'am, but so unruly and troublesome, that it was as bad as ten."

"Well, mine will not be unruly just yet, at any rate. I suppose you cannot wash and dress a baby?"

"I could if I tried, I think, but I never have."

"If you are willing to stay, I will teach you."

"I should like it so much."

"Then about wages——"

"I had eight pounds at Mrs. Wayland's."

"Then I will give you nine. Miss Simmonds knows you and your family?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, she has been so kind to us. I don't know what we should have done without her, when father and mother both had the fever."

"Shall I refer to Mrs. Wayland for a character?"

"If you please, ma'am; but I fear she will not speak very well of me, because she did not like my leaving."

"Well, I shall see Miss Simmonds as well, so I shall be able to judge, I daresay. Let me see, Mrs. Wayland's is the large house at the top of the grove?"

"Yes, ma'am; Grove House."

"Can you come directly?"

"Yes, directly, ma'am, if you wish me."

"This is Wednesday.. Suppose we say Saturday?"

"Yes, ma'am; Saturday morning."

"Yes, I think the morning will be best, for nurse will want to go early. Then I think we have nothing more to say."

With a pretty, almost graceful curtsey, the little maid took her departure, leaving Lilly warmly impressed in her favour.

The next day being very fine, she proposed that nurse and she should go with baby as far as Mrs. Wayland's for the character of the nurse-maid.

"But I must go first to Miss Simmonds, nurse; for, do you know, I was silly enough never to ask the girl her name; so I must just go and ask her what it is first. Dear old lady, she will like to see baby. You don't think it will hurt baby to go out?"

"Oh! dear, no, my dear; she can't be too much in the air in nice weather; but keep her from north-east winds and damp, that's all. You may depend upon it, when a young child does not get good, it gets harm. When shall we be ready?"

"About twelve, please, nursey dear."

At the time named they started—Lilly, her baby, and nurse; and very proud the young mother felt, as she thus walked beside the really beautiful child, and saw people turn round and look at it—perhaps some looks were directed to the beautiful mother; but Lilly did not think so; for one thing which added greatly to the charm of her

appearance was, that she was unconscious of it herself.

Miss Simmonds saw them coming, and hastened to open the door, and gave them a hearty welcome. She was much flattered that baby should pay her first visit to her, she said. She told Lilly the name of the girl was Esther Milwood, and that she was the daughter of some most estimable people who lived in a small street near ; that she had known them for many years, and could answer for the respectability and sweet temper of Esther.

"I will take you to their house, if you like ; they have only two rooms, but they are exquisitely clean, and I am sure you will like to see the home you take her from."

"I should very much ; but I have not time this morning."

"No, no, my dear ; whenever you like—to-morrow or next day."

"Thank you. Shall I come at your usual walking hour to-morrow ?"

"Yes, do ; I will go with you with pleasure."

After a little more conversation, Lilly left, and proceeded to Grove House. When the door opened to her knock, her ears were greeted by a Babel of childish voices, mingled with roars and cries, and

two or three little heads were poked out of a door to peep at the visitor, confirming the account of Esther, that they "were as bad as ten;" it seemed impossible that five children could make so much noise.

The room into which Lilly was shown (she left baby with nurse, to walk up and down in the sun) was the drawing-room; but the floor was littered with children's toys, and a general air of confusion and discomfort pervaded the room. Lillian could not help contrasting it with her own elegant little room at home, and thought that she would never, much as she loved her, let her little maid make her drawing-room in such a state.

Mrs. Wayland entered at length—a short, stout, bustling little woman, with a good-natured face, bearing the traces of having been very handsome.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting, ma'am, I'm sure. La, bless the toys, they're always under one's feet!" she exclaimed, kicking them away as she spoke, and drawing a chair into the space she thus made.

"I have called," said Lillian, "to inquire the character of Esther Milwood, who says she has been living with you as under-nurse."

"Oh, la! yes; to be sure she *lived* here. What

she calls herself, I can't say. Poor child, she hadn't much notion of being anything in particular. She's like 'em all, I think, at that age, ma'am—a rare trouble."

"But she was honest and respectable, was she not?" asked Lillian.

"Well, yes, she was that, as far as I know; but, bless you, her work was never done; and as to keeping the children in any order, or correcting them, she had not a notion of it. If she had chosen to stay, she might have made a good servant in time; but, like them all, she's off directly things ain't just as it suits them. There are no servants left; they all want places where the work is 'put out.'"

"Was she kind to the children?" asked Lillian.
"She says she is very fond of them."

"Oh, yes, as to that, she was very well, I believe; but then there was always the upper-nurse to look after her, and see she did not slap them. I leave everything to my upper-nurse as regards the children, for I've no time to see to them. I'm a district visitor, you know, my dear, and my time is thoroughly taken up. I think I have the most troublesome district of all; but the Vicar gives it to me, because, he says, I can manage people so well."

"Ma, ma!" exclaimed a chorus of voices; and the door burst open, and three children, varying in age from ten to six, rushed in pell-mell, perfectly unheeding their mother's efforts to silence them and get them out of the room. They began a long story, which, as they all spoke at once, and very loud, was to Lillian perfectly unintelligible.

She rose to go, for she felt little more information was to be obtained, and preferred relying on Miss Simmonds' account of the girl and her own prepossession in her favour, thinking that fulfilment of the duty of nursemaid to such a crew must indeed be difficult.

"Hold your tongue, children," shouted the mother, when Lilly rose. "Where is nurse? and what business has she to let you run about like this? Oh, here you are, Wickens," she continued, as a tall, elderly woman appeared at the door, which the children had left wide open; "how dare you let the children run about the place like this! Call yourself a nurse, indeed! You're not worth your salt!"

"They would run down, ma'am, all I could do," said the woman, sharply. "There's no managing them. Children I'm used to, and can manage, but not wild beasts."

"Well, then, be off with you, do all of you. When you've got as many," continued Mrs. Wayland, turning to Lillian, you'll understand all this better, shan't you? You see, young things full of health and spirits, will be noisy, and nurses are so stupid. But, pray don't let them frighten you away."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wayland, but I have no reason to detain you; I have nothing more to ask. I think I shall try Esther. I have only one young child, and I daresay she will manage that."

"I hope she may, I'm sure, and give you more satisfaction than she did me. It's a horrid plague not to be suited with one's nurse. Good evening. I'm sorry not to be able to give you a better account of her."

Lillian left the house—the din of the noisy, unruly children still going on as at her entrance—with a sense of pity for any nurse condemned to the charge of them, and a hope that she should never be afflicted with such a family.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE CLOUD.

ESTHER MILWOOD was soon duly installed as nurse-maid to the little treasure at the cottage—Lilly having been to see her home, and being satisfied that order and cleanliness had been well instilled into her there.

Mrs. De Courcy had called and raved so about the beauty of the baby as to soften the heart of the adoring mother somewhat to her. Beatrice had accompanied her, and seemed so enchanted to nurse the little thing, that Lilly had asked her to come and spend the next day with her, and have a long day at nursing.

When Leonard returned, and she told him what she had done, hoping to please him, as much as for any other reason, she was vexed by his at once saying—

“Oh! why did you not ask her mother to come to dinner?”

"Because I did not want her," answered Lilly, with unusual sharpness.

"Then I do, and I shall send her a note, begging her to come to dinner, and fetch her daughter home."

"Leonard, I do hate her so; it is unkind to insist on what I do so dislike."

"Oh! very well, Lillian; if you put it so, I have nothing more to say;" and Leonard walked out of the room.

Lillian felt he was vexed; but she thought she had more right to be so than he had. And for the first time in their wedded lives they sat down to dinner angry with each other. Truly spoke the poet when he said that "to be wrath with one we love doth work like madness in the brain." Lilly could eat no dinner, and Leonard was not much better. She would not play; he would not smoke. How apt we all are to injure one of our features, to be revenged on the whole countenance, so childish and unreasoning do our tempers make us. They spoke very little to each other, and that night Lillian's pillow was wet with her tears, for Leonard's last words had been—"Good night, Lillian; I hope when you wake in the morning you will have a better opinion of your husband than you have now;


for it is evident only a mean feeling, quite unworthy of you, prevents your cultivating Mrs. De Courcy's acquaintance." Of course the next morning Lillian awoke with a headache, and feeling as if something was the matter ; but Leonard had swept away all remembrance of the slight annoyance which had disturbed the even tenor of their way, and was as cheerful and as bright as ever, never alluding to their conversation of the night before, and going off to his office, whistling an opera air as gaily as usual, kissing Lilly with his accustomed tenderness, and saying he should be home to dinner at six, and making no mention of the De Courcys at all.

Lilly sat thinking for some time after he was gone—pondering whether it would not be kinder and more amiable to ask Mrs. De Courcy to dinner, as her husband wished it, and whether the repugnance she felt towards her was really caused by jealousy, as Leonard had suggested. She was sure of one thing, that it was not so at *first*. Her first unpleasant impression of her had been caused by her conduct to her daughter ; but she certainly was nettled at Leonard's evident admiration of one whom she so much disliked ; and she could not help admitting to herself that it did strengthen her prejudice against her. But as she sat there her

better angel seemed to bring to her remembrance all Leonard's love and tenderness to her.

A thousand little acts unnoticed at the time came back to her now, showing how he loved his little wife, renewing her trust and faith in him, till she finally jumped up, and, seizing her writing-desk, wrote a note to Mrs. De Courcy, begging to see her at dinner, and sent it off by Rachel, running off to the nursery to play with and kiss her baby, as a reward to herself for the disagreeable duty she had performed.

The room she had given up for a nursery was the spare room her mother had used. She had made it look as cheerful and bright as she could, hanging the walls with coloured prints, putting flowered chintz curtains, lined with pink, at the window, and a flower-box outside, filled with stocks and mignonette, which sent a sweet scent into the room through the open window, besides which was placed the low nursing-chair. In a recess stood Esther's bed and washstand, and across the recess in the daytime Lillian had a chintz curtain drawn, so that the rest of the room had the appearance of a sitting-room. How Lillian loved it! The little airing-horse before the fire, with the pretty little clothes hanging on it, such clothes as she had looked



at and longed to possess a wearer for when but a little girl herself, her passionate love for the waxen image of babyhood which rejoiced her childhood, being but the foreshadowing of these days of intense mother-love. All the belongings of the nursery—the bath and high fender, were all such pleasant sights to Lillian, and the room seemed to her a little haven of rest, and peace, and comfort whilst Leonard was away. She liked Esther, too, very much; there was a natural refinement about the girl which pleased her, and she learned, while she sat there nursing her baby and talking, many a useful lesson in economy which she did not forget to practise. It is a singularly rare virtue amongst those who have the greatest need to practise it; but Mrs. Milwood, Esther's mother, had been well trained in it by an excellent mistress with whom she once lived, and had found it serve her in good stead in the bringing up of her family. In Esther's neat little work-box Lillian saw, one day, a quantity of coloured silks and cottons, wound on cards, but only needlesful. Esther, seeing that she noticed them, said—

“Oh, ma'am, those are out of ladies' dresses mother and I have had to unpick. We always draw the thread out, not cut it; and so mother winds the pieces on cards, for she says they often come in

handy to mend a glove, or any little job for which only a small piece is wanted, and so saves buying."

"A very good idea indeed," said Lillian; "I shall adopt it. Your mother seems to understand economy."

"Yes, ma'am, she has been obliged to learn it. We have had a hard matter to get on when there were nine of us. Mother was troubled to feed us all; but she always managed to give us plenty, though I fear she sometimes went short herself. People used to say how extravagant she was, because there was always a good smell of cooking in our house; but mother said it cost no more to have some nice warm soup as she made, than the tea, and bread and cheese the neighbours had."

"I daresay not. You and I ought to think ourselves very fortunate in having such good mothers."

"Yes, ma'am. Mother is wonderful clever, certainly; she's got so much forecast; she always used to manage, poor as we were, to have tea when she or any one of us was ill, because she always put a few grains away in a chest whenever she made tea. She called that her store chest; and the doctor used to say there was no house he went to, when the babies were born, where he had things so nice as mother's—amongst the poor, I mean."

"A note for you, ma'am," said Rachel, entering at this moment. It was from Mrs. De Courcy, saying that Beatrice had been so naughty and troublesome that she could not allow her to have the promised treat—a day of nursing the lovely baby; so she would not render the punishment too severe by coming herself, as it would be too tantalizing to the poor child. She had no doubt Mrs. Gray would kindly name another day.

"What a wretch she is!" said Lilly to herself, as she threw the note into the nursery fire; and yet, sorry as she was for the poor girl, she could not help feeling a release from the necessity of entertaining Mrs. De Courcy; she felt it as a reward for her self-denial in asking her.

When Leonard returned, she hastened to the door to let him in, and told him gaily he must prepare for a great disappointment.

"I was such a good little wife," she said, "that I asked Mrs. De Courcy to dinner, and she won't come, because she says Beatrice has been naughty, and so she would not allow her to come."

"Then has not Beatrice been at all, do you mean?"

"No."

"And what did you do? Did you not beg for her?"

"No, I did not see Mrs. De Courcy. I wrote to ask her, and she wrote back to me that answer."

"Poor Beatrice, I wonder what she's done. Suppose I run round after dinner, and see if I can persuade them both to come round for an hour or two; it's a lovely evening."

"No, I don't see any necessity for that, dear," answered Lilly, disappointed that he had not expressed any satisfaction at her attempt to please him. "However, as you like, of course."

Nothing more was said. Leonard chatted away with his customary good-humour at dinner, and told her that he had had a good sum of money paid him, half of which he had deposited with the "nest egg," and tossed her half-a-crown, which, he said, was some "second thoughts" money; and he hoped that fund was getting on as well as his.

"Do you ever put any yourself to it?" he asked.

"Well, not often," said Lilly, laughing; "I never have any second thoughts, for I don't think I ever want to spend money on anything I can possibly do without."

"Don't you?—never see in a shop window a dress, or some fandangle or other you would like?"

"Oh! I may see them, but I never feel as though I wanted to buy them."

"Well, you're a little wonder then."

"Of course I am. I thought you knew that when you married me."

Lilly's spirits were rising with the hope that he had forgotten Mrs. De Courcy.

"I knew you were something out of the common, certainly. Well, darling, if we've finished, we may as well move; and I'll light my pipe and stroll round to Mrs. De Courcy's, and see if I can release the poor culprit."

"I don't think it will be much amusement for her to come now; she wanted the baby."

"Well, have the baby down."

"What, wake it out of its evening sleep for her amusement? No thank you, Leonard; I really think you had better fix another day for her to come, if you *must* go at all, that is."

"Oh, there's no must in the case; but a fellow wants a little amusement who's been at work all day; and it's something to do."

"You used to find me sufficiently amusing," rose to Lilly's lips; but she remembered one of her mother's wise pieces of advice, and put the words back: "Never compel your husband to stop at home with you; make his home attractive, and he will stay in it, as a rule; but men require more change

than women; and never make it a subject of complaint if there are evenings when he would prefer going out; he will for the slight change, value and enjoy his home evenings more."

So Lilly said nothing, and Leonard, lighting his pipe, went out. Lilly took up a book to read, but the time seemed so long. It was the first evening she had been alone since her marriage; and as she remembered, she felt that she had no reason to complain at this his first absence from his home; but then, whispered the bad spirit of mistrust. "He was there a great deal when I was upstairs. Is he getting tired of me?—comparing my ignorance and ordinary appearance with her beauty and talents—finding that she amuses him more than me. Oh! I could not bear that. What would the world be without my Leonard's love?" And poor, silly little Lillian, having conjured up this bugbear to terrify herself, laid her head down on her book, and cried bitterly. Then fearing Leonard would return with his friends and catch her, she flew upstairs to her own room, and tried to wash away the traces of tears, and to reason herself out of her folly; but the dreary moments went by very slowly, and he did not come back; and Rachel came to ask if she should bring the tea, or wait for master and them all; the old

feeling came back, and she felt as though she must cry again. Stay, a knock at the door ! There they are ! She flew downstairs, called hastily to Rachel to bring tea directly, and seated herself in the drawing-room to receive, as she thought, her husband and the De Courcys ; but when the door opened it admitted Miss Simmonds !

Lillian's first feeling was one of disappointment ; but the cheering voice and manner in which her visitor said—

“ ‘Pop in and see us whenever you feel dull or lonely,’ a kind little lady said to me ; somehow I did feel a little dull and lonely—so here I am.”

“And I was dull and lonely too, Miss Simmonds,” said Lillian, holding out both her hands cordially to her, “and am heartily glad to see you.”

“That's well ; husband out ?”

“Yes ; he'll not be long, though, I think, now. He only went round to Mrs. De Courcy's with a message. It is the first evening he has left me alone since we were married.”

“Truly, then, he's a model husband, and we won't scold him if he's a little late, but amuse ourselves with chat as best we can. I am more than ever glad I came in, because you might have sat here alone, and got bad friends with yourself, and

then have thought he was gone too long, and imagined all sorts of unpleasant things. I know what that is, though I and myself have lived so long together now, that we seldom disagree with one another."

"It would be difficult to disagree with you, dear Miss Simmonds," said Lillian. "Now, let me take your shawl and bonnet, and give you a cup of tea."

"Thank you ; well, just one for company's sake, though I have done all my work of that kind."

"Work !" said Lillian, smiling, as she handed the cup to her guest.

"Yes, I call eating and drinking work, and rather hard work to me sometimes—eating alone is so very unpleasant ; but I always go through it as a duty, and as regularly as possible, because I know that life and health cannot be supported without it ; and as these are valuable gifts which God has given us, they must be treasured accordingly."

"Yes, mamma always tells us that it is a duty to be careful of our health. She used to make us take a constitutional walk every day ; and when we argued that it was so disagreeable, she said, so are many duties ; but the more we persevere in doing them, the less arduous they become."

"Wise mother. I think amongst the many things which I see in these days I would have

altered if I could, is the ill-disciplined life led by young girls. There was a time when they were too much governed at home, kept under such severe discipline by their parents that their life was rendered miserable, and they were afraid of their parents, who seemed more their enemies than their friends; but now-a-days, bless my heart, they have run to the other extreme. They all do just as they like; give their opinions, and contradict their fathers and mothers in a manner that vastly astonishes me, I candidly own."

"We were not allowed to do so, Miss Simmonds," said Lillian.

"No, my dear, I am sure you were not. I can tell after a very short notice how a girl has been brought up—what sort of a home she has come from."

"Can you? Mine was a good one. I am truly indebted to my mother. Every moment I am reminded by its usefulness of some good precept she has taught me. I only wish I did greater justice to her training."

"Well, I think she need not be otherwise than satisfied with the result, my dear," said Miss Simmonds, smiling.

"I am far from as wise as I should like to be,

Miss Simmonds ;” and Lillian, raising her eyes to the kind, sensible face, felt an irresistible impulse to tell her troubles to her, so she continued—“I was actually like a great baby, crying before you came in, because Leonard is gone to Mrs. De Courcy’s. You know she is so very beautiful and so very clever, and Leonard seems so very fond of going there, that I began to conjure up all sorts of horrid ideas that he liked her better than me. I was miserable ; but you don’t think so, do you, dear Miss Simmonds ?”

“Indeed I do not, my dear child,” said Miss Simmonds, kindly ; “but you see it proves what I said, that sometimes when we sit alone, we quarrel with ourselves—that is to say, the evil spirit in our nature comes up, and suggests evil thoughts, which our better nature tries to combat, and which unfortunately, being generally the weakest, gets beaten in the contest.”

“Then what is to be done when we are compelled to be alone ? what is the remedy ?” asked Lillian.

“Occupation, my dear, occupation ! Without the least diminution of his love for you there will be many evenings on which your husband will leave you ; it is good for you both not to be always shut

up together. You will value each other all the more for the short absence; but the moment he leaves you alone, busy yourself; have some engrossing occupation which shall make the moments pass quickly, or ask some delightful neighbour, like me," she continued, with a merry twinkle in her eye, "to come and spend the evening with you. Then when he returns, no gloomy thoughts will have been admitted in his absence which will prevent the ready smile from brightening your face, and giving him a pleasant welcome home."

"I do not mind his being out; but it is being with her, whom I own I do not like."

"No more will he when he knows her better; but leave him alone to find her out. Opposition only fosters infatuation, if by her beauty and talent she has captivated him for the time, his good sense and good feeling will inevitably receive a shock when he knows more of her. He cannot often, by what I hear, frequent her house without being disenchanted, for I think, or I much mistake him, he loves goodness, and estimates it beyond beauty. Encourage his going that he may sooner be disenchanted; and do not drive him, by showing annoyance to seek refuge there, or anywhere from his home. I hope I don't speak too freely, my dear

child ; but you are so like my dear Annie Fletcher, that as I look at you I fancy it is her."

"Not one bit too freely," said Lillian. "I think you are kindness itself, and you've acted on my spirits like a bottle of champagne."

"I'm delighted to hear it ; now let us seal a bargain, that as long as I am spared you shall send for me whenever you require some mental champagne," said Miss Simmonds, laughing.

"Agreed. I shall like that much. Hark ! that's Leonard," said Lillian, jumping up.

"What, a knock ? I did not hear it."

"No, a whistle ; he always whistles for me to let him in," and she flew out of the room as though she had not seen him for a week, with a glad smile of welcome on her lips, as bright as that which used to gladden him in the old days at Old Court, which purchased for her a loving kiss, and a "thank you, darling little woman."

He was alone, and she came with him into the room with eyes sparkling with such joyful satisfaction, that Miss Simmonds said mentally—"God bless her ! and keep her thus a true and loving little wife."

"You see, dear," said Lillian, "I have had a charming companion in your absence."

"I am delighted to see you, Miss Simmonds. I hope you are come for a grand battle."

"Well, I have no objection to one, Mr. Gray. I am in a sufficiently pugnacious humour, I think."

"All right, then, ring for the tea things, my Lilly, and we'll begin."

"Have you had tea, love?"

"Yes, they would make me stay. I could not make them come here. Poor little Beatrice looked very wistful; but the mother was 'inexorable.' However, I would not come away until she had promised the poor child should come next time you asked her. Now, Miss Simmonds, I am ready."

They began their game at chess. Lillian sat down on a low chair beside them with some work for baby, and thus this evening, which had commenced so stormily, ended most happily, and Lillian went to bed with a resolution to call on Mrs. De Courcy in the morning, invite them for another day, and putting aside her own feelings, endeavour to encourage an intimacy with her, and so please her husband at the same time that she carried out her kind friend's advice.

As soon as Leonard had started in the morning, therefore, and Lillian had arranged her domestic matters, she started with baby and Esther for her

customary constitutional, which now was no longer a penance, and done for duty's sake, but a real pleasure, intending to take Mrs. De Courcy's on her return, and send baby and Esther home.

Let us precede her, and see Mrs. De Courcy's home by the light of day.

She is herself, at the moment Lilly starts for her walk, just getting up; a very pretty servant maid, dressed in shabby-fine clothes, her hair rolled back, and uncovered by a cap, is assisting at her toilet; and standing leaning against the dressing-table, is Beatrice, her eyes swollen with weeping, looking slovenly and untidy, her beautiful hair as rough as though no brush had passed through it, dressed in a greasy silk skirt, with a dirty white muslin body pinned on her, as it had neither buttons nor hooks and eyes. Was she crying because her mother was justly blaming her for such negligence? No, another cause than this just one had aroused her mother's indignation.

They were speaking unreservedly before the maid. She was a German, and did not understand a word of English.

An open letter lay on the table before Mrs. De Courcy, and putting her hand down sharply on it, she said—

"Don't be so absurd and wicked, child, as to sit there and deny the truth. If you had made no complaint, do you think he would have written as he has done? I'll trouble you, for the future, to hold your tongue."

"I did not make any complaint, mamma, I did not. Why will you not believe me?" exclaimed the girl, passionately.

"Don't raise your voice or get excited; unless you had said something about it, he never would have thought of such a thing. But I'll hear no more about it; go downstairs, and let me dress in peace, and just remember this, young lady, that I shall keep you still closer, and be still more strict with you, if I hear a murmur again. Now go."

"You're cruel and unjust enough as it is; you could not be much worse," muttered poor Beatrice, as she sauntered out of the room, with a bitter, angry feeling at her heart, sad to feel at any age, but at hers, poor child, almost unendurable. She went down into the dining-room, where the breakfast was still on the table—the solitary breakfast she had had there—her mother taking hers, as she usually did, in bed; and she stood at the window, gazing listlessly out, full of those bitter, angry thoughts which were such sad companions; indulged as they

were against her whom she should have loved and honoured above all others—her mother.

“Mother indeed!” she thought; “that poor little ragged child out there can boast a better, I believe. What does she ever do that’s like a mother? I have been taught nothing, and can do nothing. I am allowed no amusement at home, and when a kind creature asks me out, mamma gets in a rage about nothing, and refuses to let me go. Oh, dear, dear Mr. Broughton, I wish you had not written, but left me alone in my misery.” And she laid her beautiful hot face against the cool glass of the window, and the large tears fell thick and fast, dropping on her clasped hands.

She did not know how long she stood there. Her mother came down, and rung for the breakfast to be cleared, scolding that it had not been done before; but she heeded her not, nor moved from her position, nor spoke in answer when her mother said that she was going out for a drive, and she should not be home at luncheon, and perhaps not dinner; that, therefore, Beatrice had better make her dinner at luncheon; there was plenty of cold meat; and in a few moments the brougham which Mrs. De Courcy always hired came to the door, and she went away without another word, or kindly glance at the lonely

girl, who still stood with her head leaning against the window, and the large tears falling slowly down her flushed cheeks. Suddenly she started away, for a loud ring at the gate bell announced visitors, and she did not want to be seen. She did not dream of refusing herself, for no one ever asked for her ; but, to her astonishment and dismay, the door opened, and the servant announced Mrs. Gray.

Poor Beatrice ! she hastily rose from the seat on which she had flung herself, and held a hand out timidly to Lillian.

"Your servant told me Mrs. De Courcy was out," said Lillian ; "but I thought I should like to see you, and I flattered myself you would like to see me."

"So I do ; but I am so untidy, and—and——"

"Oh ! never mind that," interrupted Lillian. "I came to fix another day for you to come and nurse baby. Would to-morrow do ?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, if mamma will let me. I should like it ; but I don't suppose she will. She won't be home all day to-day."

"And you are quite alone. Can you not come back with me, then—now ?"

"No, I dare not ; she would never forgive me."

"Oh, yes ; I think mamma would not be angry

if I write a little note, and leave it for her, taking all the blame myself."

It was a bright gleam of joy, a temptation Beatrice knew not how to resist; so, with a smile on her lips, though the tears were still filling her eyes, she said—

"Well, if you think I dare, I should like it."

"Yes, we'll risk it," said Lillian. "Find me a piece of paper, and a pen and ink, or pencil, and then run and get your hat on."

Beatrice produced quickly the writing materials, and flew upstairs, calling loudly to Marie to come and dress her.

Oh, that bed-room! Shall we dare to peep in? Can we not picture the room inhabited by so fair a maiden? Ah! yes, we can fancy it bright with order and cleanliness, its walls adorned with pretty pictures, and a small book-shelf, on which are books with gay bindings—books which give some idea of the tone of mind of her who possesses them; the small bed, with its pretty hangings; the wardrobe with glass doors, in which the pretty figure can survey itself; flowers in the window; ornaments on the mantel-piece—treasured gifts from kindly friends. Is that the room into which the young girl hurries now? Alas! no. Slovenliness and discomfort

seem to have taken up their abode there. A settle-bed, on which is flung some dirty clothes ; a chest of drawers, each drawer half open ; no curtains at the window—only a dirty, torn blind ; no ornaments, no pictures, no books save one, a torn and dirty railway novel on the mantel-piece ; a small table, on which is a shabby toilet-cover, and a miserable dressing glass ; a brush and comb, which, from their appearance, can well account for the rough hair which has grieved Lillian to look at. Such is the room poor Beatrice owns.

She is long dressing, even with the maid to help her, for nothing can be found. Her stockings are not paired, her dress has been pushed into a drawer without folding, and is full of creases, which the maid tries in vain to get out. Her hat and cloak are searched for vainly, and discovered at last under the dirty clothes on the bed ; and then only one glove can be found ; and so she goes with only one, trusting Lillian will not notice it. Poor child ! As much, perhaps more, to be pitied than blamed, for no gentle mother's teaching has sought to make her neat and orderly—has told her how debasing to the mind are habits such as hers, and how sad will be her future, if ever she is wife and mother, and brings to her married home disorder such as this.

Did the contrast strike her, when she went to take off her things in Lillian's room, where cheerfulness, comfort, and order seemed to reign and flourish? And yet Lillian had been at small expense; taste, and cleanliness, and neatness had joined their simple but strong forces together, and made the humble little room what it was.

Beatrice said how pretty it was, and wished hers was like it. Lillian laughed, and said it was not very elegant, only tidy; but when Leonard grew rich, she meant to have a lovely bed-room, for it was a thing she delighted in.

Then they went to the nursery, where baby had just woke from her morning sleep, and Beatrice took her, and seated in the low chair by the open window in that pleasant room, a sense of peace, hope, and happiness came over her to which she had long been a stranger. It was a quiet, happy day altogether; her beautiful face looked lovelier than ever, with the discontented expression all gone, and she seemed to forget her dreary home, and all its sorrows, and thoroughly enjoy the present.

Leonard had returned, and they were just going to sit down to dinner, when a servant arrived with a note, which at once changed the aspect of affairs. It was from Mrs. De Courcy, and ran as follows:—

"It was most kindly meant on your part, dear Mrs. Gray, to take Beatrice home, but unpardonable in her to go. She knew I was seriously displeased with her, and had no business to go without my leave. I must request that she return home *immediately* with the servant.—Yours sincerely,

"A. DE COURCY."

What was to be done? They decided there was no alternative, and the poor child, with white face and tearful eyes, kissed Lillian, and walked silently and sadly home.

Lillian could not resist saying to Leonard, "That's a nice sort of mother. Poor, dear child, how I feel for her!"

"But, Lillian, we must be just; perhaps Beatrice has been very troublesome," said Leonard.

"She is too old to be treated so, if she has been. I should like to tell Mrs. De Courcy what I think of her," answered Lillian, hotly.

"Hey dey, little woman! don't you take any cayenne pepper with your dinner to-day. Come, it's ready; let us go and eat it, and forget this little episode which has so disturbed my gentle little wife."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST SORROW.

THE next morning, when Leonard had just started for his office, and Lillian had gone through the ceremony of watching him out of sight, as she always did, and, with apron and gloves on, was preparing for her morning's work, a note was brought her from Mrs. De Courcy, and an answer waited for. Opening it, with surprise and indignation she read the following:—

“DEAR MRS. GRAY,—It is mistaken kindness to encourage a disobedient child. Please send Beatrice home *immediately*.—Yours, in haste,

“A. DE COURCY.”

Lillian, throwing off her apron and gloves, went at once to the servant to know what the mysterious note could possibly mean.

“Miss De Courcy is not here. I don't understand this note,” she said.

"Well, ma'am, it is very strange, then, for Miss De Courcy is not in the house anywhere, and mistress made sure she was here."

"She is not indeed, nor have I seen her since you fetched her last night. You had better run quickly back, and tell your mistress so."

The maid ran home accordingly, unable to resist stopping at one or two places to relate the exciting news that "our young lady" was lost; and Lilly returned to her domestic occupations, wondering not a little at this romance of real life. Could it be possible that the poor child, tried beyond her powers of endurance, had run away? Lilly felt most interested, but disliked Mrs. De Courcy too much to mix herself up in the matter by going to her, as she would otherwise have felt inclined to do. She quite longed for Leonard's return, to acquaint him with the strange news, doubting not that he would go round himself to inquire if she had returned.

Mr. Broughton was seated that same morning at his luxurious breakfast. Through the open window came sweet scents from the garden, filled with the choicest flowers, and bees were humming among the blossoms, and birds singing and twittering amongst the trees, busy with their nests and

eggs, adding to the many pleasant country sounds which, even so near London, made one fancy that miles divided it from the great metropolis.

He was sipping his coffee as he read his newspaper, occasionally walking to the window to speak to the gardener, who was sweeping the lawn he had just mown—Mr. Broughton sticking to the old fashion of mowing instead of using a machine; for he liked the pleasant noise of the scythe, he said, and disregarded all his gardener's insinuations about the quickness and general improvement of the new method. A ring at the visitor's bell startled him at length from the leading article in which he was interested, and he put the paper down in expectation of the announcement to follow, wondering not a little who his early visitor could possibly be.

"A young woman—girl—lady, sir," said the man, hesitatingly, as he entered the room, closing the door behind him, "wishes to speak to you."

"A young lady at this time of day? Some of the neighbours?"

"No, sir; her veil is down, sir, and she spoke very low."

"Bless my heart! who can it be? Well, show her—no, put her in the library, and I'll come."

"I have shown her in there, sir."

"All right, all right, I'll come. Bless me, how very odd!" and pushing his fingers through his hair, with a glance at the mirror over the mantel-piece, he walked off into the library. But he was ill prepared for the scene he was to encounter. The girl rose at his entrance, and seizing his hand, in a voice choked with tears, exclaimed—

"Oh, Mr. Broughton! dear Mr. Broughton! let me stay with you—do, do. I can bear it no longer. I will be your servant—anything—if you will let me stay here, and never, never go back any more!"

"Beatrice! Is it possible? What does this mean?"

"That I am wretched—oh, so wretched! Mamma—mamma has shaken me, and hit me, and used me cruelly. I can never go home any more. You are my only friend; let me stay here!"

"My poor child!" he said, tenderly drawing her towards him, "this is a sad tale. What am I to do with you? You cannot stop here. I must take you home."

"Oh, no, no," she said, clinging closer to him, and lifting her beautiful face, streaming with tears,

to his. "I never will go home again—never. Let me stay with you. You say you are lonely often. I will cheer you, and love you, and never let you be lonely again; only do not send me back to my wretched home. She was so angry with you for writing about me, and has never been the least kind to me since."

Mr. Broughton was as much embarrassed and distressed as any bachelor might be in a similar position, with a young and very lovely girl thus throwing herself on his protection; and he was at a loss how to act for the best. He certainly could not send her back in the state of excitement she was then in, and he thought, therefore, the best plan was at once to summon his housekeeper, a kind old body who had lived with him since his boyhood in different capacities, and place the poor girl in her charge, until he could think the matter over, and determine what to do.

Bidding her, therefore, to try to command herself, and removing quietly her hat and cloak, and seating her in his own arm-chair, he went in search of Mrs. Stephens; and soon poor Beatrice was comfortably established in the housekeeper's room, with a nice breakfast before her, more tenderly and lovingly waited on than she could ever remember

being before, whilst Mr. Broughton was concocting a letter in his library to send to Mrs. De Courcy. Having, after spoiling two or three sheets of paper, succeeded in writing what he thought would do, he rang the bell, and desired the man to send a boy off at once with that note, and to wait for an answer, saying he himself was going out for a short time, and that no one was to be admitted in his absence. He then went to the housekeeper's room, and told Mrs. Stephens he was going out on a little business, and that she was to take great care of Miss De Courcy, and allow no one to see her, or lose sight of her herself for an instant.

In the meanwhile Mrs. De Courcy seriously alarmed, and yet violently angry, was hurrying from place to place, where she could imagine her daughter to be, and finally went herself to Lillian, and in the most excited manner declared that she must be in her house, and that Lillian was concealing her; and poor Lillian was positively alarmed at her vehemence, and knew not what to do. She assured her that she had not seen Beatrice since the night before, and suggested that she might, merely in a little temper, be trying to frighten her mother, and would presently return.

“But I cannot go home and sit still and wait;

I shall go mad. She is young and pretty, and some horrid mischief will happen to her, I am sure; let me stay here, I cannot remain alone. Oh! who can call children a blessing? They are for ever a misery and torture from their birth. May I stay here?" again she asked, stopping in her excited walk up and down the room.

"If you wish," said Lillian, not knowing how to refuse; "only if your daughter returns you will not know it."

"Will you mind sending round to say I am here, and they are to let me have news directly there is any?"

"I can do that," said Lillian, "certainly."

"Do, then, do, and I will stay till your husband comes home; perhaps he can suggest what course I must take, if by that time she has not returned. I won't be in your way. I can stay in your bedroom, or anywhere, only let me be where I can speak to some one, if I wish. I could not stay in my own house alone."

Lillian, though much annoyed and even alarmed, could not help feeling some compassion for the unhappy mother, whom it was evident laid blame to herself in this matter, which must, Lillian felt, increase her distress greatly. She despatched

Rachel, therefore, with the message, who on her return, brought word that Miss De Courcy had not been heard of, but there was a note for Mrs. De Courcy, and the boy was waiting for an answer.

She opened it eagerly, and calling to Lilly, who had left her alone to its perusal, she handed her the following :—

“DEAR MRS. DE COURCY,—It has come to my knowledge that your daughter has left her home through some misunderstanding, and resolutely refuses to return. If you will accept my advice, you will place her at once with a lady friend of mine who receives a few pupils, and who would make her, I am sure, a happy home, and take every care of her. Pardon this interference of an old friend who heartily wishes happiness to you and yours.

“F. BROUGHTON.

“P.S.—I will make any arrangement for you with the lady, and have your daughter conveyed there if you like.”

“What does this mean, Mrs. Gray, is she there, think you : at Mr. Broughton’s, I mean ?”

“He does not say so.”

No, but how else should he know about the

matter at all? I will take a cab and go there at once myself. That will be the best way, don't you think so?"

Quite willing to be rid of her, Lillian made no objection, and Rachel was again sent out in search of a cab, the boy being told to run back, and tell his master Mrs. De Courcy was coming herself.

Lillian most anxiously awaited Leonard's return home to recount the day's adventures; but about an hour before it was time for him to return, her attention was entirely diverted by Esther's sudden summons to the nursery to see what was the matter with baby. It was not, therefore, the bright face of his wife which met Leonard as usual on his return, but the pale anxious one of the young nurse, who told him, "Mistress was in the nursery; baby was not well."

Of course he hastened there at once, and found Lillian with the child in her lap, breathing very heavily, with a flushed face and little dry lips, certainly, even to his inexperienced eyes, looking far from well.

"Oh! Leonard, dear," she said, raising a very sad-looking face to his, "baby is so ill."

"So it seems, darling; but it will be all right again presently, I dare say. Babies, I believe, have

always got something the matter with them—it's got a tooth coming, perhaps."

"It is too young, I think, for that. I have given it some medicine, dear nurse left with me, and if it is not better in an hour's time I must send for a doctor."

"Oh yes, have the doctor, dear, by all means, if you think it can do the poor little mite any good."

"Well, mamma says doctors know nothing about small babies, and if she was near, I should send for her instead; but I must have some opinion beside my own if she does not get better; but I will write to mamma to-night, and ask her to come over."

"Do, by all means. I dare say she will know what to do with it. Shall you be able to come down to dinner?"

"Oh, yes, dear. Esther will take baby, and ring the bell if it's the least worse, won't you, Esther?"

"That I will, indeed, ma'am."

Lilly would have greatly preferred staying with the child. Appetite she had none; the face of her darling and its little moaning cry haunted her all dinner, but she felt that her duty was there; she had done all she could for the child, and was ready at hand to be summoned if she was needed. To sit

and watch it would have done it no good, and her husband would have had a comfortless, lonely meal without her, and she was rewarded for her self-denial by his expressions of delight at her coming down, saying he hardly expected her, and that if she would prefer being upstairs she was to go, and he would manage. But she told him no, she knew Esther was as anxious and watchful as she could be herself, and would call her if needful; and then Leonard would insist on opening a bottle of wine, and making her drink a glass or two, which revived and cheered her; so that afterwards while he went to smoke his pipe she was able to go back to the nursery with a better and more hopeful spirit. Baby had fallen asleep, but the breathing was still heavy and laboured, and there was no improvement in the symptoms, so she thought it better to send for the doctor. He pronounced it a slight derangement of the stomach, and ordered a mustard plaster, and he would send a powder to be taken immediately, and would look in in the morning early; Mrs. Gray was not to be at all alarmed, etc., etc.

But Mrs. Gray was alarmed, for the evening passed and far into the night, and the little one was no better. Leonard, more anxious for her than the child, would not go to bed if she did not, so

together they kept their watch beside it, sending Esther to bed with Rachel.

The cold, grey morning dawned—chilly even in summer, those early hours when one has been up all night—and still the little patient had made no progress, and when the doctor came it was to assert that inflammation had set in, and he had fears of the child's recovery. Poor little Lillian, she was very patient, very still, unnaturally so. Leonard did not go to town; she besought him not; and her mother came, in answer to her summons. Everything was done that could be done; but ere the close of another day, the reaper came to gather the flower of which "the Lord had need," and Lillian's little blossom was borne away to bloom in Paradise.

For years after, her face, with its piteous expression of entreaty to him, as it were, to save it and help her, haunted Leonard. He could only take her tenderly in his arms and bear her from the room, which she let him do unresisting, for what use was she there now? And she lay cold and tearless, with her head on his shoulder, whilst he tried with loving words to cheer and comfort her.

"I wish she would cry," her mother had whispered to him; and it made him anxious to see the dry eyes—the grief was too hard, too bitter for

tears. But presently, when Esther stole gently into the room, and kneeling down beside her mistress, tenderly raised her cold, passive hand, and with her own face streaming with tears, said, "I am so sorry," then the floodgates were unloosened, and throwing her arms round the girl's neck—the girl she must ever love, who had loved and cared for and sorrowed for her lost treasure, she found relief in tears, bitterer than she had ever shed in her life, but relieving the hot brain and the poor heart, which had felt full to bursting. Leonard let her weep unrestrainedly for some time, and then calling her mother, he induced her to go to bed, where, worn out with grief and watching, sleep came at length to give her temporary forgetfulness.

I will not write of the sad days that followed. Those whose lot it has been to bear such a trial know but too well what the young mother felt—can remember but too vividly, aye, even if many bright, happy little ones have come to fill that vacant place, how the first darling was still tenderly remembered and mourned for—how none of the others, dear as they all were, were like that first; and how, deep down in the mother's heart, hidden away that none might see or know it, lay the shadow of the cross it had been her lot to carry.

Those who have not had sorrow come to them in like manner would not understand it, probably, if I wrote pages on the subject; but would say, as many of Lillian's acquaintances did, "Oh, only a baby a few months old! Much better to go now than when it's older!" and wonder that it should be thought a heavy grief to bear.

Lillian could not find it in her heart to send Esther away at once, so she stayed on assisting Rachel, and doing needlework; and the nursery was dismantled, the things locked up, and Lillian never went into it, but tried hard, for Leonard's sake, to be his bright, cheerful little wife again; and, as we are all helped to do what we strive to do for love and duty's sake, so the smiles came back to Lillian's face, and the lightness to her step, and Leonard's home was as cheerful as ever, though the little angel they owned in heaven was tenderly remembered, and its resting-place on earth constantly tended and visited.

Mrs. Leigh stayed with Lillian for a week or ten days afterwards, and before her departure Lillian asked her (and it was the only conversation she permitted herself on the painful subject) whether she thought the doctor had done all that was right for baby?

"That, my dear, I should not like to doubt; but you know my opinion about doctoring babies. I have heard an eminent medical man say that an old nurse, or mother with a large family, knew better how to doctor babies than any physician; that the less medicine administered the better; and that common sense for a doctor, and patience for a nurse, would often save the little life lost by too much interference. But you could do no other than you did, love. Had your darling been taken from you without your having sought medical aid, you would have blamed yourself, perhaps, and others would have blamed you. Now you have at least the satisfaction of knowing you did all you could; and you have only to bear it patiently, as coming from Him who does all things well, and orders all things aright for those who love Him."

Of course the painful excitement of this event had driven all thoughts of the De Courcys from Lillian's mind; but when it was all over, her mother gave her a note which Mrs. De Courcy had sent her, and which she said she had opened, and answered, telling her of the baby's illness, and she had sent to inquire after Lilly several times since. The note was to say that she had discovered her daughter, who, in the most "shameless, daring

manner," had gone to Mr. Broughton, and that she had placed her now, by his advice, at school, where she hoped she would learn better discipline, and "to appreciate the home she had deserted, and the mother's love she had spurned."

Lillian then told Leonard the whole story, but he still seemed more inclined to take the mother's part, and so she dropped the subject, and it had not been again renewed by either of them.

Miss Simmonds had been most kind and sympathizing to Lillian in her trouble; and Mrs. Leigh said she felt so much more comfortable in leaving her with the knowledge that so kind a friend was near her. A day or two after her mother's departure, Lillian received, one morning, a letter in a handwriting she thought she knew, though she could not remember whose it was, and was, as we are all so apt to do, staring at it, and wondering who it could be from, when Leonard said—

"Don't you think the mystery might be solved by opening it, love?"

Lillian laughed, as she answered—

"Yes, what a goose I am. Oh, darling, it's from Agatha Hepburn, asking us to go and see her. Read what she says. I can't read it out loud," said

Lillian, with tearful eyes, and she handed him the letter.

"My child," it began, "it's a bad trouble to bear; even I, husbandless and childless, can imagine what it is. Change of air, and scene, and association, must be good for you. Come to me with your husband; the place is looking lovely; it is very quiet, and you can wander about in my grounds or the woods unmolested. It will give me pleasure to be of service to you, and my pleasures are few. From your friend

"AGATHA HEPBURN."

"Well, love, what do you say; shall we go?" asked Leonard.

"If you like, my dear, and you think we can afford it."

"I think we might manage that certainly; but I am not quite sure whether I can get away for long enough to make it worth while, and you will not like to stay without me."

"Oh, no! do not mention it, darling. I cannot bear you to be away a moment from me now more than you can help."

"Still I even think a week would do my little woman good. I haven't got all the roses back yet.

I have a curiosity to see this good body, too ; let us go. I have been working hard, and a change will do us both good."

And so Lillian was induced to write and accept Miss Hepburn's kind invitation, and together they started for Hampshire on the Monday following the invitation.

The village was more than two miles from the station, lying, as Mrs. Leigh had described it, hidden away among the hills, and as picturesque and romantic as the lover of such scenery could desire. The house, or rather cottage, was old-fashioned, but as pretty and commodious as possible, and the garden lovely ; abundance of roses of every hue and growth, monthly, standards, moss, both white and pink, filled the air with their delicious fragrance ; one climbing rose, on the wall, had grown to the very chimney-tops, and clustered round a window, which, as she drove up the neatly-gravelled carriage-road, Lillian hoped would be her room. She felt a little nervous at thus encountering for the first time one who had figured in her father's early history so strangely, it seemed like making acquaintance with some one out of a book, and her heart beat quicker when, on the door being opened by an old manservant, there stood in the

hall a tall pale woman, with snow-white hair, braided beneath a blonde cap, and dressed in a grey silk of such richness that it seemed as if it would stand alone, who advancing with extended hands, said—

“Welcome, child of my old friend; and you, too,” turning to Leonard, “welcome for her sake. Come this way, my man will see to the luggage, and all that is necessary,” and she led the way into a room furnished with such taste and comfort, that it gave at once an impression of home. It was a long low room, with two large bay windows, and a glass door which opened on to a lawn sloping gradually down to a trout stream flowing at the foot of the range of high hills which surrounded the village, making it answer Mrs. Leigh’s description of a village playing at hide and seek with other villages. The two windows of the room looked from the side of the house into a garden arranged in the Dutch style, with trimly-cut hedges and yew-trees in fanciful forms, the beds of different shapes filled with flowers of the brightest hue, and in the centre of each a standard rose-tree laden with its fragrant blossoms.

“Oh, how pretty!” exclaimed Lillian.

“I am so glad you think so, my love,” answered Miss Hepburn, “and I fervently hope to make this

visit a bright spot in your memory. I should like you to have only pleasant associations with Horn-dean." The slight stress she made on the "you," Lillian understood as an allusion to her mother.

"My wife is such a passionate lover of the country, Miss Hepburn," said Leonard, "that I am obliged to let her live in a house that has a garden to it, and pretends to be the country, or she would pine away like a woodland bird in a cage."

"I think people with minds generally love the country, Mr. Gray."

"I am afraid I have not one, then," answered Leonard, laughing, "for though I think it delightful for a change, I must own I should not like a residence in the country."

"Because, perhaps, you love society, and there I admit the superiority of town; but surely you love and admire nature, which is what I mean by country."

"Oh, yes, I can thoroughly appreciate its beauties, and ——"

"And could you," interrupted Miss Hepburn, with a faint smile, which seemed an unfrequent visitor to her lips, "could you bring London society and conveniences into the country, you would be content to abide there."

"Well, yes, perhaps I might."

"And that society," said Lillian, "is one amongst the many things which I dislike in London, the dreadful visiting."

"I am glad to hear you say that," replied Miss Hepburn, "for one of my difficulties, when I do invite any one to stay with me, which is very rarely, is that I can offer them no gaiety, no dinner-parties at home or out. I have never cared for visiting since—since I was very young, and so I have purchased for myself the lonely life I lead. I go to see no one, and no one comes to see me, though I believe, for a country village, this is reckoned very gay. But you will go to your rooms now, my dear, will you not, and get rid of your travelling gear?" And ringing a bell, which was speedily answered by a neat elderly woman, dressed with the homely plainness of bygone years, before crinolines and other finery had become fashionable in the kitchen, she said—

"Show Mrs. Gray to her room, Magdalene. If you will follow them, Mr. Gray, you will find your dressing-room. I shall send a cup of tea [to your room, Lillian; and I hope you, Mr. Gray, will try and ask for what you want, as I do not so well understand gentlemen's tastes. Dinner is at seven; there will be a bell at the quarter before, but you

will find me in the drawing-room whenever you like to come down. I trust you will not consider a full evening toilet necessary, unless you prefer it—in short, I wish you, as far as you possibly can, to act as if you were in your own house.”

Lillian, who was very tired, gladly accepted this permission; and so, merely exchanging her travelling-dress for her black silk, after having thoroughly enjoyed a delicious cup of tea, she returned to the drawing-room, and found Miss Hepburn seated by the open window, with a large frame before her, in which was fixed a beautiful group of flowers she had worked, and was now grounding.

She said Leonard was exploring the grounds, and enjoying a cigar at the same time.

“Oh, Miss Hepburn, but he must not bring his bad habits here,” said Lillian. “I fear he will shock you.”

“Not at all, my dear; I like every one to be happy their own way. I should not quite like him to smoke in my dining or drawing-room; but in the garden, or greenhouse, or in a little room which I call my garden-room, he is welcome, as I have told him, to smoke as much as he likes. Not having a gentleman here for him as a companion, I am delighted to find he can amuse himself so well.”

"You are very kind, I am sure," said Lillian. "I have not interfered with his smoking, but encouraged it rather at home, because mamma said it was so important to do all I could to make his home happy, and not, by opposing his fancies, drive him from it."

"Your mother was always good and wise. Such a mother could not fail to make her daughter a good wife."

A deep sigh followed this speech, and for some time Miss Hepburn did not speak again. Lillian took up a book of beautiful illustrations on the table near, and then, seeing Leonard in the garden, said she would go to him, if Miss Hepburn had no objection.

"By all means, my child. As I said before, consider this, as far as you can, home, and do as you like."

So Lilly stepped through the open window into the garden, and, joining Leonard, she wandered with him in the lovely grounds, and by the banks of the stream, happier and more cheerful than she had felt since her baby's death. They talked together of their hostess, and agreed how courtly and gracious her manners were, and how kind she was, though so calm and undemonstrative; and

both said they noticed that in her face and in her voice there was something which seemed "as though a deep and a mighty shadow across her soul was cast," which would rest there till her death, and which they agreed they should have noticed even if they had not known her early history.

The change had certainly as good an effect as could be desired on Lillian, so that Leonard was really sorry to take her away so soon, and joined his entreaties to Miss Hepburn's for her to remain a little longer; but without Leonard she said she really could not, yet with real regret she left the beautiful spot where she had passed, as she assured Miss Hepburn, a most happy visit, which would cheer her with its pleasant memory many and many a time.

"Do you know, Leonard," said Lillian, as they were whirling along at railroad speed on their way home, "I half fancy Miss Hepburn means to leave us her property, by something she said to me."

"Oh, nonsense, little woman!" said Leonard, looking up from the "Times," which he had been busily perusing; "what next will you fancy?"

"Well, dear, do you know she asked me so many questions about our income, and said that that place was her own, and that she had no one

to leave it to, for she had neither kith nor kin. Oh, Leonard, only fancy that sweet place being ours ! ”

“ Ah, my dear, never indulge in such fancies ; they have caused more disappointment than anything in this disappointing world. People often give you a notion in their lifetime that they intend leaving their money to you, and die, leaving you behind, and their money to an hospital, or some hundredth cousin no one ever heard of before. I shall never believe in a legacy till I’m called on to pay the duty.”

Lillian laughed ; but though she said no more, she could not quite resign a hope that some day they might wander again in that lovely garden, which, when its present possessor had gone to that rest for which she had told Lillian she pined, might then be their very own, where Helen and Emily, and dear mamma and papa would come and visit them, and one of the girls, perhaps, would marry the curate there, whom Lillian had remarked was very nice-looking—and—and the most beautiful airy castle that ever was built was shattered to pieces by a railway guard demanding their tickets.

CHAPTER X.

NEWS.

THE visit to Hampshire had done Lillian as much good as Miss Hepburn had kindly intended, and she was not only her old bright cheerful self again, but the look of health had returned, greatly to her good old friend Miss Simmonds' delight, for she had been a little anxious about her gentle little friend. She drank tea with them the night they returned, and they asked her if she had heard anything of the De Courcys.

"Well, only thus much, that Madam is very happy, freed from the responsibility of the young lady, and disports herself merrily—goes to all kinds of exhibitions, fêtes, plays, operas, and comes home late at night, or rather early in the morning; and, scandal says, forgets that her servants want anything to eat."

"What a hard case it is," said Leonard, angrily, "that a woman cannot be pretty without the most

shameful scandal and ill-natured reports being incessantly circulated against her. Why may not a woman like her, without a young family to think of, enjoy life, and go out and see all that's to be seen? I see no sin in it; but because she does this, she must be accused of starving her servants."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gray," answered Miss Simmonds; "I admit I deserve a scolding for repeating a scandal, which is the next worst thing to inventing it. The tongue is certainly an unruly member—I sit corrected."

"I think it's quite likely to be true, Leonard, dear," said Lilly.

"Oh, of course you'll say so!" he answered, sharply.

"Bless me, how clumsy of me!" said Miss Simmonds, jumping up hastily; "may I ring the bell for a cloth, dear? I don't know that I've done such a careless thing as that since I was old enough to know better; and you'll admit that's a long while."

Miss Simmonds had spoilt the first breadth of her gown in upsetting her tea, but that mishap could easier be remedied, she felt, than what might be caused by a word spoken in haste. The amiable "ruse" succeeded, and the evening passed without further mention of the De Courcys.

The next day, when Leonard returned to dinner, Lillian could see directly that he looked worried, but she would not remark on it, feeling sure he would tell her if he meant her to know, and that if it was nothing worth repeating, it would pass off, and be forgotten the sooner for not being spoken of. He did not talk much during dinner, but in the little room over his pipe afterwards, he said—

“I’ve been terribly bothered to-day, Lilly.”

“I was afraid so, dear. You looked worried—what is it?”

“I hardly like to tell you, for I am afraid you will worry, then.”

“I shall worry more if you do not—do tell me!”

“Well, then,” said Leonard, “a man for whom I have done a great deal of business has suddenly and unexpectedly failed, and I shan’t get a sixpence.”

“Well, that is trying and vexatious; but never mind: I thought it was something much worse than that. The poor man is the most to be pitied, I think,” she answered, cheerfully.

“Yes, but I may be soon in the same plight, if such things are to happen to me. I had relied on the money for paying several things, and now I must use what Mr. Broughton will pay me instead,

which I had counted on for rent, and taxes, and coals. It's thrown me out altogether, and I'm afraid we must reduce our expenditure, and I really don't know how."

"I do," said Lillian. "We must get Esther a place; that will be one less to keep and pay. I have felt it has been extravagant keeping her."

"Oh, my darling, that is a sacrifice all on your side."

"That's the proper side, dearie," she said, smiling brightly in his face; "you earn the money, the least I can do is to save, and make the most of it."

"You're a dear good little woman, and I wish I was rich for your sake."

"Wait a bit—Horndean," she said, laughing.

"Oh, my dear girl, pray do not let that idea rest in your mind, or you will be so bitterly disappointed if you are mistaken."

"No, I shan't indeed, there'll be something else. People who try always get on. I'm not a bit afraid. You'll come home with such a bright face some day to tell me you've got to build a new palace for the Queen, or some one has left you a great fortune, or taken you into partnership, or something or other—come home you will, with ever

so much brighter a face than this silly old one you've had to-day, which I shall now kiss all over until there is not a single bit of cloud or gloom left on it." And so she did, making him laugh as he had not felt an hour ago he could have laughed, so infectious was her cheerfulness.

Before he returned home on the following day, she had got over the disagreeable duty of telling Esther she must leave, and had been to Miss Simmonds to consult her on a little matter of business which had been satisfactorily arranged, so she was ready to receive him with the brightest of smiles, and a piece of news which she said he must guess.

"Miss Hepburn's dead, and has left you Horndean!"

"No, silly boy, nothing of the sort, not quite so good as that."

"You've got a place for Esther."

"No; better than that."

"Oh! I know; Mrs. Harry's got a little boy."

"No, no, no," she said, laughing, and clapping her hands with childish glee.

"I've got it, Anna Maria's going to be married."

"No, no, you ridiculous creature; but you burn a little."

"Then it is something about Anna Maria."

"No," she said, standing on the very tips of her toes, and holding herself in this difficult position by the lapels of his coat, looking in his face, with hers all sparkling with laughter.

"Then I can't guess any more."

"Oh yes, do try, it's such fun."

"Well, then, is it anything about being married?"

"Yes—it is."

"I have it, then—Miss Simmonds is going to be married."

"Bless her dear old heart, she's too wise to be plagued with any of you men. No, I *will* tell you, you seem in too goosey a humour to guess. Well, then, Helen is going to be married. Dear mamma came over and had lunch with me, on purpose to tell me. And they are so pleased; he's got a capital property, so there's nothing to wait for, and they are to be married directly. Isn't it famous, only poor Emmy is terribly down-hearted at the thought of losing her."

"She must follow her example as soon as possible, that's all. Well, this is brave news. What's the gentleman's name?"

"I should like to make you guess that, because I believe you never would. I think that's the worst thing about it, his odious name!"

"Why should I never guess—is it such an uncommon name?"

"No, I can't say it's uncommon, exactly," she replied, laughing.

"Why, you're full of mysteries! I wouldn't mind betting a shilling I knew—it's Tom Smith."

"Oh, Leonard, somebody told you!"

"No, upon my honour; but that isn't it, really, is it?"

"It is indeed—how could you guess?"

"I really don't know; but don't you know the old story that if you run against a man in the street and say, 'Beg your pardon, Mr. Smith,' you are safe to be right."

"I've heard that, certainly; but Tom, how did you guess Tom?"

"Well, it's nearly as common."

"It is, certainly; isn't it horrid?—fancy our pretty Helen being Mrs. Tom Smith!"

"Well, never mind, if she's happy and well off, we'll forgive the name. You'll be wishing my name was Tom Smith, I'm afraid, when you find how comfortable she is."

"I shall not, you horrid naughty boy—Leonard, dear," she said, more seriously, "don't think that riches would make any difference to me; you don't really in your heart, I believe. If you were as poor as possible, do you think I would give you up to be as rich as an empress?"

"No, my good little woman, I know you would not. Well, now, in return for your news, I have something to tell you. On Monday I am going to run away from you."

"Oh, Leonard, where?"

"Well, luckily for me I've got a job which will, I hope, go some way towards repaying me for my loss; and so, though it does take me away from you, I am glad."

"How far is it?" she asked, the brightness gone from her face at this, to her, terrible announcement.

"It is in Hertfordshire. I shan't be gone long this time, only I must often run away while the work's about; but you'll get used to it at last."

"That I *never* shall," said Lillian, emphatically; "and you must go on Monday?" she asked, pitifully.

"Yes, and it has struck me you might drop mamma a line and say you would come to her

meanwhile, for I shall not be back before Wednesday night."

"Well, that would be the only way to bear your absence. I think I will write. They will be delighted to have me."

"Yes, and you can help them with the wedding finery, and that will console a woman for anything."

"Except parting from you."

He laughed, and asked her what she would have done if she had married a sailor?

"I should never have done such a thing," she answered.

"Not if he had been as fascinating as Leonard Gray?" he asked.

"No, not even then."

"Ah! say you don't know. I must be off in good time Monday morning, so, like a model little wife as you are, let me have breakfast by eight o'clock, and see about a little valise for me to put my things in; I shan't want to take much, and my portmanteau is too big."

"Yes, dear, I'll see to that, and I shall go off at the same time that you do to mamma; the house will be wretched without you."

And so, as of course they were pleased enough

to have her at home, Lillian, with a very aching sensation in her throat and very watery eyes, after watching her husband until she could see no glimpse of the cab or sound of the wheels that bore him away, started for Old Court.

It certainly was the best thing she could do, for it amused her so much to see Helen in her new character of *fiancée*; then there was Tom Smith to be seen; he was asked to dinner on Tuesday to meet her; and to Helen's delight she gave her entire approbation to her new brother-in-law.

They had a happy quiet day altogether, and though thoughts of her husband, in this his first absence from her, did every now and then distract the little wife's serenity, still she enjoyed her day very much. It was lovely weather and the garden was looking so pretty, and it so amused her watching the young lovers and talking with her mother over Helen's prospects.

"She will not have to fight the world like you, darling," said Mrs. Leigh; "she is to have four servants—cook, housemaid, maid, and man."

"Oh, dear!" said Lillian, laughing, "she won't look at such small folks as us then, I suppose."

"Ah, dear child, I do not think it will make

the least difference to her. I am concerned about poor Emmy, she quite frets at the thought of losing her sister."

"Let her come back with me. I suppose I am to be asked to the wedding," said Lillian, smiling.

"Of course, love. Well I shall be glad for her to do so ; I will tell her so, and it will be something to look forward to."

Then Lillian told her mother she was going to part with Esther, and if Helen had not yet chosen her servant, she thought she would make such a nice housemaid for her.

"Part with Esther ; oh, what a pity. Why do you do that ?"

"I think it so extravagant to keep her, we really don't want her." She would not say exactly why, for fear of worrying her mother.

"I must say I think it a pity ; however, it is a good idea about her going to Helen : she has left the choice of her servants to me entirely, so I will say for certain we will take Esther if she likes to come ; they do not want to live far from London, but not quite in it—somewhere Highgate way is proposed ; and on Thursday it is fixed we go house-hunting."

"Oh, that will be charming to have her within

reach ; and Esther will be so delighted to think she is going to remain in the family."

"Yes, I dare say she will. . She is a nice affectionate girl. And now do tell me some more about Agatha Hepburn ; I had not half talk enough about her on Wednesday, we had so much to say." And then they talked over this Hampshire visit, walking arm-in-arm up and down the lawn, Emmy contenting herself with her father, whilst the lovers cooed in the shrubbery until the first evening star shot into the sky, and it was thought prudent to go in.

Lillian would go early the next morning, though her husband was not expected until the last train at night, because she was so anxious to have everything nice at home for him—her welcome after his first absence ought to be so perfect, she felt.

She was wondering as she came home in the omnibus what she could surprise him with—whether there was anything he wanted she could buy ; what she should get him for supper ; and, in short, full of thought for him and his comfort—when two gentlemen stopped the omnibus and got in ; she had been alone till then—of course she took no notice of them, nor they of her, beyond the first stare, which she had now got used to, and she returned

to her own thoughts of him to whom this short absence had more endeared her ; but presently a word or two of their conversation arrested her attention, and she could not forbear listening to what they said.

"She's always taking in some young fool or other," said one, in evident allusion to some person of whom they had been talking.

"And old fools, too, if you come to that," said the other. "Look at Mr. B."

"Well, I think there it's the question whether it's the mother or the daughter."

"I don't know ; to my taste the daughter's the handsomest."

"She will be, she's what you may call 'raw' now, and besides she doesn't have the foreign aid of ornament ; the mother's always awfully well got up."

"Yes, stunning. But I say, this youngster's a married man, isn't he ?"

"Yes, so I heard."

"How does his wife like it ?"

"Ah ! oh ! I dare say she doesn't know. I don't believe there's any real harm in the woman ; but she likes a slave, and if he's a good-looking one all the better."

"What's the new one's name, do you know?"

The friend bent forward and whispered; Lillian would have given worlds to hear that name, as she sat there with flushed cheeks listening to what she feared she understood too well.

"When did she go out of town?" asked the questioner again.

"Monday I went to call. I've not been there since her last evening, and found she was gone."

"And he went with her, did he?"

"I heard they were seen at the station."

And then they talked together in lower tones, and on other subjects, and Lillian heard nor cared to hear more. She was relieved when the omnibus stopped at the top of the road, and she could get out and walk rapidly along to expend her excitement; and yet she thought "I'm very silly; there are more pretty women in the world with pretty daughters besides Mrs. De Courcy; why should I think it is her? I will not be so stupid." Esther let her in, and asked anxiously if she was quite well.

"Oh, yes, quite; only rather tired, she had walked so fast." And then she at once began ordering the supper, and bustling about the house, not the least as though she were tired, but with all

she did the conversation in the omnibus continued to haunt her, until she determined to put on her things again and go and call on Mrs. De Courcy ; if she were at home, all was well, and then anxiety would be at once set at rest. So telling Esther she should not be long, she was only going to make a call in the neighbourhood, she started off ; but a few moments brought her with her quick step to Mrs. De Courcy's gate ; the bell was not answered immediately, in her impatience she rang again, the servant came at last, and to Lillian's inquiry for Mrs. De Courcy she said her mistress was out of town ; she had gone on Monday, and was not expected home till the end of the week.

Lillian hardly knew how she got home ; it must be true those strangers did mean her husband and Mrs. De Courcy ; and she had wept at his absence, and longed for his return. And he—oh ! it was too cruel ; and so with this burden on her heart did poor little Lillian sit and fret, and weep all the long hours alone. She forgot her agreement to send for Miss Simmonds when she wanted some mental champagne, which she certainly did now, but sat pitying herself and blaming her husband, until the hour when she expected him home. How her foolish little heart beat then at every sound of

wheels! What should she say when she did meet him? Could she run out to him and kiss him, as she was wont, believing he had so deceived her? No, she would be cold and distant to him, and then he would want to know what ailed her, and then she would tell him all she knew, and ask him to vindicate himself—ask him if this was the way to repay her trusting love, if he could hope she would ever love and trust him again. Yes, the finest speeches she concocted there alone to make him when he returned—grand enough for a Mrs. Siddons to have uttered in some thrilling tragedy; but on looking up at the clock she found it was nearly an hour past the time when her husband ought to have been home. And then a fresh terror seized her?—was he killed on that awful railway? should she have him brought home by some doctor, frightfully mutilated? or be telegraphed for to some inn, where he was lying insensible with a host of other sufferers? All her wrongs were at once forgotten in this fresh alarm, picturing him suffering—the dear face convulsed with pain, or lying all unconscious; how could she think of herself then, or of any fancied wrong or slight? And her distress of mind was at its height when Rachel, putting her head in at the door, with a face of extreme terror, said—

"Oh, ma'am, sure something must have happened to master; he's a hour after his time—and the death-watch his a going—hon—hin the kitchen!"

"Get me my hat and cloak, Rachel," she said; "I can't sit here any longer; I shall go to the station."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, let's both go together. Stay! hark! here's something a stopping! It is! here's master, or what's left on him!"

And Rachel flew to open the door, and Lillian, too much agitated to move, stood in the hall, till the cheering voice of her husband, saying—"Well, my poor little darling, I suppose you've been frightened to death; the train's an hour late!" made her fly into his arms, and there sob out her joy and sorrow.

"You very silly little goose," he said, as he almost carried her into the drawing-room, "you don't mean you really have been so very uneasy. Well I'm here all right; and I tell you what we must have—a bottle of wine opened on the strength of it, for I am sure you want some. Hallo, Rachel! here, just stay with your mistress while I get some wine. She's been so frightened."

"Oh, dear sir, I don't wonder at it! One does hear such things now-a-days. What with collations

on the line—and bridges falling—and murders in first-class carriages—it's enough to make one vow none of us would never go nowhere!"

"Ha, ha! so it is, Rachel. Now, my darling, drink this, and tell me you're glad to see me now I am come."

Lillian raised her tear-stained face to his, and kissed him; but she could not speak then; for now he was there, safe and well, the old shadow came back; while her terror for him had for the time vanished. At length she said—

"I am glad if you are glad."

"Why, glad, of course I am. I tell you what, Lillian, I wouldn't be a bachelor again for a million of money; and I tell you another thing, I'm as hungry as I can be; so now about some supper."

"It's quite ready on the table."

"Good little woman, let's go and have some;" and he ate his supper, chatting all the time; and then asked if he might smoke one pipe at least—if she was not too tired to stay with him. Rachel and Esther might go to bed, and then he said—"I don't believe you are glad to see me, or else your fright has knocked you up. What is it, darling; you are not a bit like yourself?"

Now for the fine speeches—the accusation—the

denouncement—standing up before him, her little figure drawn to its full height, her eyes flashing virtuous indignation? No; only the little figure kneeling down beside him, and laying the poor flushed face and aching head upon his knee, and murmuring—“Why did you go out of town with Mrs. De Courcy, and not tell me?”

He threw aside his pipe, and raising her in his arms, looked in her face for a moment, and said—

“My child, what *do* you mean?”

Then she told him all—all she had heard in the omnibus—all she had done herself.

“Well,” he said, when she concluded, “it is fortunate I did not leave this about,” and he took a note from his pocket and handed it to her, “or you would have been more wretched than you have been, which would have been unnecessary; read it, and then I will go on.” She read it through her blinding tears.

“DEAR MR. GRAY,—Can you spare time to see me on Monday to the Shoreditch Station? it’s an awful place to get to, and I don’t like going without a cavalier; you are always so kind and obliging that I feel you will do this if you can.

“Yours, A. DE COURCY.”

“Now Lillian, like an idiot—and it is all the blame I can attach to myself—I did not show you that, because I thought you would be vexed. I did not accede to her request, because I could not in the first place, and because I thought it strange her asking. I wish to heaven I had shown it you, and my answer, which was :—

“‘DEAR MADAM,—I am myself leaving town on business that morning, and cannot comply with your request. I think you need be under no alarm in driving from your own residence to Shoreditch alone.’

“That was what I wrote. I am grieved, Lillian, beyond measure, that you should have worried yourself so unnecessarily and so unjustly. I do not know what I have done to merit it.”

Thoroughly vexed with herself, and grieved that she had for a moment thought ill of him, Lillian knew not how to make reparation. She could only say she was sorry, and beg him to forgive her ; but they both went sad and miserable to bed ; and thus this “coming home,” which was to have been so bright ended so differently ; how seldom does anything happen just as we have thought it would !

how rarely can we do even the simplest things we arrange to do exactly as we intended; so true it is "that man proposes and Heaven disposes." But with the morning came happier feelings to both of them. Leonard freely acknowledged that he was quite wrong not to show Lilly the note, and also comforted her by saying he had quite done with Mrs. De Courcy; she said she had been foolish in not asking him the truth before she doubted him; and, making a compact of perfect mutual confidence for the future, Lilly let him go off to town happier and brighter, perhaps, for this slight storm which had thus disturbed their domestic horizon.

One evening, some weeks after this, Lillian, who had been very busy all day superintending that painful domestic necessity—a thorough clean—looked out with more than usual eagerness for her husband's return from business. She had felt rather low all day, and a variety of household worries had vexed her—nothing of any consequence, but still in every home there are days when things will not go right, and everything and everybody seems to do just what they ought not. So this day, Lillian having had a score of little troubles, was looking forward more than commonly to seeing Leonard, and hearing his bright voice bidding her

not bother herself about such trifles, but the usual hour passed away, and to her surprise no Leonard arrived. He had never been late home before, with the exception of that horrid evening when the train was late, and that was no fault of his; his business being for the most part, in the neighbourhood of London, he could always get home in time for dinner; he had said nothing in the morning of having further to go, or given her the least idea he would be late. The dinner must be put back; there was another worry, for of course it consisted of two dishes that would bear keeping less than most. Lillian was a little cross first, then very much astonished, and finally very anxious, though she tried to remind herself that there was nothing the matter when she fidgeted before: and that a business man being an hour late ought not to cause anxiety; only then Leonard had always been so punctual, and it did not signify, she always should fidget if he was after his time. But her anxiety did not last long this time, and her suspense took another turn, for when she had walked to the gate for the twentieth time, she saw him coming down the road in a Hansom cab! He who more often saved even the trifling omnibus fare by walking home, to be dashing along in a cab! Was he hurt

or ill? No, she soon saw there was nothing the matter, for his face was all smiles, and he sprang out of the cab, and was by her side in a moment.

"My darling," she said, "what has kept you so long? I have been so anxious, and I think I wanted you to come home early more than ever to-day, people have been so tiresome, and I'm afraid now the dinner is quite spoilt."

"Well, never mind the dinner, that will be right enough, and people have not been tiresome to *me* to-day. Only think," he said, as he entered the house and flung himself into the nearest available chair, "I have been successful in having my plans and estimates accepted for a large new insurance-office that's going to be built, and that's what has kept me."

"What plans—what office, Leonard?"

"Well, little woman, you see, I would not tell you for fear you should be disappointed; but more than once I have been trying to get hold of some work by which I should be more likely to get a name than these everlasting terraces and rows of shops at Bayswater, and Brixton, and Battersea, our living though they have been; and so I sent in some plans and estimates for a large insurance-office they are going to build at Brighton—quite a grand

elevation I can tell you, and mine have been accepted. There were a great many others, and I hardly thought I had a chance ; but this afternoon, just as I was thinking that there was little more to do to-day, and that I might as well start for a walk home, a messenger came to me with an intimation that I was, if possible, to go at once to the temporary London office of this Insurance Company in the Strand, or, if unable at once, to call to-morrow morning at twelve o'clock. Of course off I started, and there, to my surprise—I need hardly say delight too—I found my plans were the chosen ones ; and though there was no doubt about it, yet, of course, some explanations and arrangements, and naming a surveyor, who should go into all the quantities with me—for they want the business put in hand at once—why, it all kept me till, as I came out of the office and looked up at St. Clement's clock, I saw I was actually behind my dinner time, and I fancied my little woman looking out of the window, and thinking and wondering ; so I jumped into a cab—the new building will support that extravagance, I think—and here I am as hungry as a hunter, so let's have dinner."

"My darling, I am glad you have been so fortunate, but I am always a little sorry for these works

away from London. You won't have to see after it *very often*, will you?"

"You little goose! of course I must watch the building, or what would be the use of an architect; but, thanks to the railways, a great deal can now be done between an early breakfast and a late dinner, and a little run to Brighton won't hurt you sometimes. However, that's all to come. Now order in dinner, I won't be a moment."

And so the dinner, spoilt as it might fairly have been considered, seemed as good as any dinner Lillian had ever given him; and they talked away brightly, and positively looked forward to the possibility of Leonard being able one day to build a house on his own land, entirely after his own plans, that should embrace every little fancy either of them could imagine; and then came the cigar, when, after a pause, as Leonard enjoyed the first few whiffs, he looked up rather suddenly at Lillian, and said—

"I say, Lillian, why have I never insured my life? I think I ought. This building I have got to carry out just reminds me. I am sure it is a prudent thing to do, and how would insurance-offices find business enough for such large premises if nearly every one did not insure their lives. It is very strange we have never thought about it before."

"Don't say *we*, Leonard, for I am sure I don't quite understand what it is. Just tell me, because if people talk to me about the insurance-office you are going to build, I ought to be able to tell them something at least about it."

"Well, Lilly, of course you know what fire-insurance is, for, as you remember, we have insured our furniture here; so, if a fire should take place, we should get the value of what was burnt. But what I have never thought seriously enough about, and what is now almost the chief business of the offices, is life-insurance."

"But if you lost your life, what good would it be to you that you had insured your life? You could not have the money."

"No, goosey; but if my life was insured for £500, and anything happened to me, there would be a nice round sum for my widow and children to receive, to prevent their being in pecuniary trouble while settling what to do for the future. Now, to gain that sum at my death, I should have to pay somewhere about £12 or £13 a year now, and I am sure it would be a satisfaction to both of us to know that there was something when I am gone, even if that event should occur before I have had time to save anything much."

"Don't talk so, Leonard ; I can't bear to hear about having £500 when you are gone. I should not care about anything then."

"Ah ! but, my little woman, *if*—and of course I only say *if*, for I hope we shall both live to bring up a family well—*if* I should go, would there not be the additional trouble of want of means, if I left very little behind me for you and any children we might have? Being left alone is bad enough for a wife, but matters are ten times worse when there is little left for her to do with. I will go and see about it before I am twenty-four hours older ; and I really think we can quite afford the sum required for the premium, if we are a little careful now. Why, the second thoughts' money would go some way towards it."

"I think you are right, darling ; but there is no insurance or any other office, that would pay me for losing you."

"You little women are all alike, always back to the same idea ; but still I will do it as soon as possible, and I am sure every prudent man would say I was right. But I've had hardish work and a good deal of excitement to-day, so let us be off to bed early to-night, and to-morrow I will begin to carry out all my new plans."

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

A new life had dawned for poor Beatrice De Courcy. It may seem to some of our readers that school and happiness are not synonymous ; but in her case they were ; she was very happy—happier than she had ever been in her life. Mrs. Gresham was an old friend of Mr. Broughton's, as he had said, he had known her from a child. She was gentle-hearted, ladylike, and clever, with a tender love and sympathy for the young, which made her eminently fitted for the line of life which unfortunate circumstances had induced her, for her support, to enter into. Her school—if so it could be called—consisted of only eight girls, and they were all either orphans, or deprived in some way of a mother's care and love ; her own two daughters were educated with them ; and it only seemed that she had eight more children, so tender and affectionate was her manner to her young pupils, so anxious the

care bestowed on them. Each girl had her own pretty little bed-room, furnished simply, but tastefully, to which they were permitted and encouraged to add any ornamentation they chose, which occasioned an amicable rivalry to produce the prettiest room ; and Mrs. Gresham was frequently called on to decide as to which was really the best.

There was no carpeted school-room, with hard forms and bare walls, for them to work in, but a delightful library, in which Mrs. Gresham sat with them always ; and in the evening they all adjourned to the drawing-room, where fancy-work, games, music, and pleasant books passed the hours till bed-time. They had the best masters for all their accomplishments, but no other female teacher than Mrs. Gresham herself ; and it was a pretty sight to see them surrounding her in the summer evenings, by the open window, or in the winter, by the red glow of the large fire, listening, as she told them some tale, or, what they better loved, told them of her own life—her head, perhaps, leaning on the shoulder of one who sat behind her ; another by her side, holding her hand ; and another—perhaps the most coveted place of all—on the ground at her feet, with her head pillowed on her lap. As they could not all thus take possession of her, as it

were, they agreed to take turns, and they were most particular that the turns should be regularly kept.

At first, Beatrice was cold and strange, and, what seemed to those brought up in such an atmosphere of love, wanting in affection ; but she soon altered ; words of kindness and sympathy addressed to her which she had never heard, at last found their way to the poor little heart, only grown cold from neglect, and soon she was found glad to take her turn to sit at Mrs. Gresham's feet, and lay her head in her lap, and feel the kind, motherly hand resting on her, smoothing her beautiful hair, now as glossy and silky as it was once rough and disorderly. Oh, it was indeed a new life for Beatrice ! and daily was its better influence working on the poor girl.

Mrs. De Courcy, unshackled by the care of this her only daughter, pursued her own amusements, and might have forgotten her existence, but for her anxiety to keep well with Mr. Broughton, which induced her, every now and then, to take the brougham and call at the school to see her "darling child, about whom she was so painfully anxious," and whom, she was afraid, "gave dear Mrs. Gresham an infinity of trouble."

"Not at all," Mrs. Gresham would answer, with

her kind and genial smile ; “ the trouble, if so you call it, is too great a pleasure for me to think it one. To see the dear girl daily, I may almost say hourly, improving, is such a reward and satisfaction, that I should think any trouble light that was so rewarded.”

“ Well, I’m sure, my dear madam, I’m delighted to hear you say so,” she would answer ; “ but really I could do nothing with her ; any attempt at teaching her was received with a torrent of tears, which really, with my shattered nerves, I could not encounter ; and so,” she continued, with a shrug of the shoulders, “ there was nothing for it but to leave her in her ignorance. Of course, you found her awfully backward ?”

“ Yes ; but singularly quick and intelligent,” said Mrs. Gresham. “ So the want has been quickly supplied. She is getting on capitally with everything.”

“ Well, I’m sure you must have a wonderful knack of teaching, which I own I never had ; and a life of repeated trials and disappointments did not help to give me that patience and perseverance without which it is impossible, I am sure, to teach.” And drawing a richly-trimmed handkerchief from her pocket, she hastily wiped her eyes, as though

anxious quickly to conceal the emotion her own words had caused; and then rising and taking Mrs. Gresham's hands in both hers, she thanked her warmly for the great kindness she was showing "her dear girl," and left her impressed with the belief that Mr. Broughton had judged the poor mother too severely, and that nothing but circumstances over which she had had no control had caused the seeming neglect of her daughter.

And during these months in which Beatrice was improving under Mrs. Gresham's care, changes were taking place in Lillian's home. Helen was married, and Esther had gone to live with her as housemaid, notwithstanding another little charge had arrived at the Cottage to need a nurse. But Lillian had made up her mind to try and do without a nurse, and with Rachel's ready help, and faithful Anna Maria's services for one or two days of the week, she was getting on famously. A little son this time claimed her love and care; and fond enough she was of the sturdy fellow, who, as he was twice the size, seemed to have also twice the strength of the baby sister. There were times, when he lay kicking on the rug by Lillian, as she worked, tears would rise to her eyes as she thought how pretty it would have been to have seen that

baby sister playing beside him ; but she knew it was better as it was—the child was happier, and she could not have managed so well as she was doing, with two to claim her care and attention.

The nursery was restored now to its former aspect ; again the cot, and high fender, and bath, were in their places ; and there Lillian gave her orders for the day to Rachel ; there she was to be found in charge of her boy, with her basket of work beside her, busy, happy, and cheerful as any little woman need be.

The business which in the last chapter was mentioned as having been satisfactorily accomplished between herself and Miss Simmonds, was, that Lillian had thought she ought to endeavour to turn her talents to some account, and employ the time she had on her hands profitably. She remembered hearing Miss Simmonds speak of some little girls in the neighbourhood, friends of hers, who wished to learn music, and it had struck her, that if Miss Simmonds would kindly speak for her, she might get them for pupils ; but would prefer their coming to her for their lessons, as she should then not have to be absent from home, but still keep a supervision over everything there.

Miss Simmonds had spoken in such terms of Lillian, that the mother was delighted to obtain such a teacher for her children, and accordingly it was arranged that twice a week the two little girls should come to the Cottage to receive their lessons; and enthusiastic was their account of their lovely mistress, her great kindness, her beautiful playing, and the beautiful piano she gave them their lessons on; so that their mother, Mrs. Selwyn, greatly congratulated herself on finding a person who could make that most irksome of studies, the commencement of music, a pleasing one to her children, and thanked Miss Simmonds accordingly for the introduction.

Lillian feared, at first, that Leonard would object; and he did begin to say he thought she had enough to do without, and that he did not want his wife to be a teacher; but she stopped his mouth with kisses, and told him that she thought it a wife's duty to bring "grist to the mill," if she could, and that if he found any duty was neglected, or his home less comfortable in consequence, he was to tell her so; and so admirably did she manage, doing all things by rule, and each duty punctually to the moment, that he was obliged to own it made no difference to his comfort, and to

consent that, so long as it was not too much for her health, the lessons might continue.

The little girls made rapid progress under her kind tuition, and Lillian grew quite fond of them, and they of her. After the birth of the baby boy, there was no reward thought so great as to be allowed to nurse him when the lesson had been satisfactorily gone through; and many an afternoon was the request made that they might come and spend an hour or two playing with darling baby. Pleased that her children were so pleased, Mrs. Selwyn came to call on Lillian to thank her for her kindness to them, and hoped that she would come and see her, and with her husband pass a quiet evening with them.

"We do not give parties, Mrs. Gray, and are very quiet folks," she said. "We are accustomed to live prudently now, and bring up our children carefully and well, so that if our lives are spared when they grow up, we shall be able to afford to give them the society and amusement they will naturally then desire. We cultivate now a few friends, but not a large acquaintance; let us number you among the former."

Mr. Selwyn was a merchant in the City, and had often come home with Leonard in the omnibus,

and talked to him, and Leonard had thought him a very pleasant fellow, so was willing to accept the invitation so kindly and cordially given. Out of this laudable wish to assist her husband, therefore, Lillian formed an acquaintance, and finally a valuable intimacy, which lasted her lifetime.

Mrs. Selwyn was soon warmly interested in the pretty young wife, and amused and pleased with her little economical plans and schemes, and her devoted childlike love for her husband. Though many years older and more experienced in the ways of the world, Mrs. Selwyn found she was indebted to Lilly for many domestic hints, and arrangements, and economical dishes; for the little wife had made it her perfect study from the moment she was married. Often had her father and mother wondered at the way in which she had settled herself down, young and pretty as she was, without a thought of gaiety and amusement, her life passed in administering to her husband's comfort, in ordering his house aright, and expending the money he earned to the best advantage; and all this not done with a gloomy face, a victimized air, claiming pity for her wasted youth and beauty, but with an earnest delight in her employment, a genuine interest in what she did, which lightened all the

labour and kept her fresher, brighter, and prettier than she would have been had she led a life of gaiety, such as would seem better suited to her age and beauty. Little more than a year had passed when the boy—a fine sturdy fellow, just beginning to toddle about, and with his staggering steps perpetually frightening his mother—had a companion, another boy.

“Well, I should have liked a girl best,” said Lilly, “but perhaps it’s better, because they can play together, and go to school together.”

“So they can, good little woman,” said Leonard; “you always make the best of everything; but two boys! it’s awful to think of.”

He was very proud of them notwithstanding, though he pretended not to be, and very anxious about them too, more fidgety over their baby ailments than Lillian herself, who was growing quite learned in baby lore of all kinds.

The building of the insurance-office was going on well, but Lillian was earnestly hoping for it soon to be ended. She did not in the least get accustomed to her husband’s absences; but she did try not to bore him with complaints; for, of course, the more his business increased, and the wider his connection became, so much the more would he be

compelled to leave her. Since the arrival of the second child, she had found it more difficult to manage the music lessons ; but, as she justly said, the more children there were, the more it was necessary to increase, if possible, their income ; so she determined to persevere, feeling sure that good management could surmount most difficulties.

Her mother began to grow anxious about her, fearing she would do too much. And when the second boy was a month or two old, she came over to see how Lillian was, and how she managed. It was delightful to be met at the door, as usual, with a face bright and rosy, no look of pain or weariness in it, carrying her baby boy in her arms, the elder one holding by her dress, delightful to hear the dear sweet voice as she said—

“You see we keep two men-servants, grand-mamma. We have grown grand since you were here.”

Grandmamma kissed the little men-servants tenderly, and their lovely mother too, and followed them into the drawing-room, tidy and pretty as ever—no trace of baby fingers having disarranged it, no litter of children’s toys. Mrs. Leigh looked round with a pleasant smile of satisfaction.

"I am glad to see the pretty little drawing-room still the same, dear," she said.

"Did you think you should find it turned into a nursery, mamma dear?" asked Lillian, smiling.

"Well, something very like it, I own—in short, I was curious to come and see how you get on, it is so long since I have been to see you; not since this little gentleman was two days old."

"No, you really have not; your spare time is given so much to Helen—how is she?"

"Rather better. I was there yesterday, but she is very delicate, and yet she has every luxury she can desire, and is waited on hand and foot; whilst you, my poor little darling——"

"Are the 'poor little' donkey what works very hard," said Lillian, laughing, and taking a mass of her beautiful hair out of master baby's fingers. "And yet, thank God, I'm as well as I can be."

"It is wonderful; I am come to learn how you do it, and to see that it is not killing you," answered her mother.

"The last object of your visit you can satisfy yourself at once about, can you not? And the first I hope you will find out by staying all day and until to-morrow."

"Not till to-morrow, love. Your father is

coming for me in the evening. Emily is staying with Helen. So as he has business in the City, he said he would take a chop with Harry, and then come on here. How good that boy is seated at your feet so quietly."

"Yes, I am obliged to accustom him to behave himself in the drawing-room, for I have no nurse to leave them with ; I am obliged to bring them with me here when by chance I have a visitor. I don't encourage formal visitors ; you know the few who come to see me are friends, and kindly forgive the infliction of children."

"They are no infliction, I am sure, so pretty and so good ; and how nicely they are dressed, too, Lillian."

"Dear papa's wedding present, at least part of it, I spent on their little wardrobes. You know I invested it so that it has grown since papa gave it me, so I took some out and bought a regular stock of things for the children, not frocks and made-up things, but holland, flannel, calico, print, braid and buttons, and then I looked into the shop-windows, brought home the patterns in my head, and, with the help of a poor lame girl in the neighbourhood, whom it is a charity to employ, and who works most cheaply, I made all their things. Arthur only wears

these holland pinafores ; he has only one frock, which has a jacket of the same material, and so serves him for a best in-door and out-of-door dress."

"But these nice ribands at his shoulder, and his sash, all help to make the holland look so nice. Would they not almost buy another frock?"

Lillian laughed, as she answered, "They are some bonnet-strings of mine, which I cleaned and ironed, and split up and pinked out myself; and another set he has was a broad sash of mine I had to a muslin dress when I married. He has one set quite new, which are kept for Sunday. But come up and take your bonnet off, mamma dear, and then we'll show grandmamma Arthur's funny blue pinafore he wears in the nursery."

"Shall I carry him? he can't walk up, can he?" asked grandmamma.

"He can crawl up bravely, but I'm sure he would like to be carried best. He often says, so pitifully, 'tarry boy,' that I'm obliged to carry them both up, which is rather hard work."

"I should think so. Come along, boy. Fancy poor Helen carrying two such young Hercules' as these," said Mrs. Leigh, as she very readily deposited the child on the nursery floor.

"This is my sanctum, mamma dear, you see, and not remarkable for neatness. Here I permit Arthur to make what strew he likes, but nothing is permitted downstairs but a large Sunday picture-book, which Leonard shows him on Sunday, sent by grandmamma Gray."

"Oh, picky-book," said the boy, understanding the last words, and hastily throwing down the headless horse and wheelless cart he was going to amuse himself with, he ran to his mother.

"No, my boy," she said, "not to day; Sunday; Arthur has the book when papa is at home and can show it him. Not now, dear; go and buy mamma some cotton, and bring it home in your cart;" and so, quite satisfied with his mother's explanation, he proceeded with his cart to the nursery window, where was arranged on the sill some empty reels of cotton, which he put into his cart, and conveyed them to a basket near his mother's work-table, into which he deposited them, and found ample amusement in taking them in and out, giving no trouble whatever to his mother, except an occasional answer of "yes" or "no" to some remark in high Dutch he every now and then addressed to her.

And Lillian laid baby on the ground, and sat down beside her well-filled work-basket, drawing up

near her a lounging-chair, into which she placed her mother, saying, "There, mamma dear, you will forgive my working ; I know it never prevents my chatting. Now, ask me any question you like, and I will answer it to the best of my power."

"Well, I should really like," said Mrs. Leigh, settling herself in her chair, "to ask you for a sketch of your day, from the first thing in the morning till bed-time. I should like to amuse poor dear Helen, and tell her how you do it. But will that sweet fellow lie there ?" she said, pointing to baby.

"Oh, yes, he's used to it, bless him. Arthur amuses him, I think, moving backwards and forwards. Well, now, what shall I tell you ? My days are not all alike ; the days I give lessons are the fullest ; shall I relate the arrangements for those?"

"Yes, do," said Mrs. Leigh, smiling ; "you are a wonderful little body."

"Well, then, to begin with : Arthur sleeps Rachel's room and baby in mine ; as soon as Rachel is dressed, she brings Arthur, if he is awake, to me, and I keep him and baby as good as I can till she comes with some warm water, and that is the only time I bore Leonard with the children, but of course I cannot help that. He just sees baby is all right while I dress Arthur, then Rachel

takes him and puts him in a high chair at the nursery table, and gives him his breakfast, and has her own. Whilst I dress, baby lies in bed kicking and crowing, or asleep. Then I go to the nursery, and stay with the children whilst Rachel gets our breakfast, and in like manner she stays with the children whilst I eat it, and see Leonard off to town; then I go upstairs to the nursery, and tell Rachel about dinner, and what orders I have for the day: and away she goes to work, whilst I see to baby and tidy the nursery; then she comes up and takes baby out, and Arthur goes about the house with me, whilst I see to the flowers in the drawing-room and dust the ornaments, and do a heap of little jobs, he chatting all the while as busy and happy as can be. Baby comes in and goes to sleep, and then Arthur and I take our little walk; it's not a long one, as you may suppose, but it is a little air for him, and off he goes to sleep, and I sit down to work and watch them both till a quarter to twelve, when my little lame friend arrives, the work-girl I told you of. I have her always on my music lesson days, because she works and minds the children too. At twelve my little girls come, and leave at one o'clock; then Arthur has his dinner with my lunch, and baby lies in his

bassinette beside us, awake or asleep, as his little lordship pleases; then those days we get a nice walk. You know I'm a great advocate for air; my lame friend keeps house, and Rachel and I and the two babies start out. Sometimes we get into an omnibus, and go right away somewhere for an hour or two, getting home in time to see to the dinner, of course, and I give Arthur his tea, and put him and baby to bed, dress myself whilst they are getting off to sleep, and am ready for Leonard on his return."

"Then," said her mother, "do you have no more trouble with the children afterwards?"

"No, they have a nice supper when I go to bed at ten, and I hear no more of them till the morning. Rachel, after she has cleared away dinner and washed up, takes her work or book up beside them, and if they wake, which they rarely do, she sees to them, so that I am never called away from Leonard in the evening. I sit with him whilst he smokes, seeing to him and all just the same as when we had no children. I never let them interfere with his comfort more than I can possibly help."

"That is right, love; you see the advantage now of beginning from the beginning to let your children have a good evening sleep; if they are

accustomed to it from their birth they always will, and it is the greatest comfort and advantage to themselves and those who have the charge of them."

"Yes, I don't know what I should do if they were up crying all the evening, or what Leonard would do; like all men, he imagines babies are tools, and can be dealt with accordingly, and must be asleep when they are wanted to be, and never be a nuisance. However, thank goodness, up till now he has never once complained of them. I tell you who is so fond of them, that is poor old uncle Pritchard."

"Is he? poor old man; and Mrs. Gray, has she seen them?"

"No; she is to spend Christmas with us."

"But you have no spare room now," said Mrs. Leigh.

"No; I put my friends to sleep at Ivy Cottage, where Miss Simmonds lives; you know there is always a bed there. Well, what do you think of my day and its duties?"

"I think you manage admirably; but I shall be glad when you can afford to keep another servant; can you not manage it yet? It seems such a pity to have parted with Esther, though she is invaluable to poor Helen."

"Well, I hope, mamma dear, by the time Leonard has finished the works he is busy on now, we may be able to keep a girl, and I have half agreed to take Anna Maria in the kitchen, and then Rachel is to have the children, because I can trust her so implicitly. Oh, if it was not for her willingness and quickness, I could not get on as I do."

"No, I dare say not; you are well rewarded for your patience in teaching her at first."

"I am, indeed. Ah, Arthur," she said, jumping up, "we have been talking to grandmamma, and never put on your wonderful nursery pinafore; let us show her what a funny little boy you look;" and Lillian took from the bed a dark blue print, made into a loose kind of frock, which slipped over the child's head and entirely covered his little holland dress, "ribands and all," as Lillian said. "So you see, if any one calls and I want him to look nice, off this comes, and he's clean and nice underneath, and fit to go downstairs."

Grandmamma highly approved of the plan, and then took up the little patient baby, whom she thought had had quite enough of the floor, and, to his entire satisfaction, nursed him till luncheon-time.

"And what of Mrs. De Courcy?" asked Mrs. Leigh, as they sat together again after luncheon; "I have heard nothing of her for an age."

"Nor have we," said Lillian; "Leonard is tired of her, I think—he hears such tales of her. Beatrice has been at the same school ever since, and is wonderfully improved. I should like to see her, but I can't get away from home to such a distance as that."

"And dear old Miss Simmonds?"

"Oh, she's charming, I am thankful to say—as well as ever; she is my greatest comfort. She lets me come sometimes to her of an afternoon with both the babies, and they roll about on her carpet just as they do at home, and she has endless amusements for Arthur, whom she delights in, that it makes such a pleasant change for us all."

"Yes, that is very nice. Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you Miss Hepburn is very ill. I had a few lines from her the other day, written in wretched spirits."

"Poor thing! I must write to her, she was so kind to us. Leonard laughs at me so because I say she will leave us Horndean and all her property."

"There are more impossible things than that," said Mrs. Leigh.

"Ah, mamma dear, that would be nice; your poor little daughter would be in clover then. I don't think, though, I should know what to make of it—I dare say I am happier as I am."

"I think it would be difficult for you to be more happy, love. You look the picture of health and content; and I shall go home perfectly satisfied about you."

Leonard and Mr. Leigh arrived together, and Lillian insisted on her father staying to dinner, for she was sure he had only lunched at Harry's, and it would be too late for supper when they got home; there was a moon, and they must stay; so her persevering solicitations, succeeded by her husband's, were successful, and they sat down to table with them. And much they praised the young housekeeper for the well-arranged dinner, and the good management which made her unexpected guests cause no confusion.

"Lilly always manages to have a nice little joint of some cold meat in the house, and some capital good pickles," said Leonard, "so that I should never be afraid to bring any one home unexpectedly; and then she sets it out so nicely, that it makes it all look more than it is."

"Well, you see, mamma dear, we can't afford

to give parties, and it would be so dull for Leonard if he never saw any one but me; so I tell him, if he has any particular friend, to bring him home now and then. It makes a little pleasant change for him; and, brought home like that, they don't expect anything grand; but I always like to have it nice. Even when we are quite alone, the table is always laid in the same way, so it does not put Rachel out; it's only another knife and fork to put."

"The first time I brought any one home, you know, mother," said Leonard, "I was rather in a fright, wondering whether the little missis would scold, and whether there would be enough for dinner; and you've no idea how well she managed, and how good she was. She just whispered it would be a quarter past the usual time, and then she popped out of the room for a few moments, and then came smiling back, and chatted away to my friend till dinner was ready; and, to my surprise, there was some capital soup, a little cold leg of lamb, and the little hot dish which was the only thing we were going to have, and a mould of jelly, and a Welsh rabbit. Why, it was a dinner for a king; and, moreover, the poor man was so thoroughly captivated with her, that he would have

eaten a stewed horse-shoe, and been none the wiser."

"Don't, Leonard, be so ridiculous," said Lilly, laughing and blushing.

"You see she has had such good teaching, Leonard," said Mrs. Leigh, "in the art of house-keeping."

"And fascination," added Leonard, smiling, and bowing to Mrs. Leigh.

"Oh! of course," she answered; "but I could not have managed as Lilly does at her age, or so early in our married life."

"No, dear, because you had not such a mother as Lilly had."

"Oh, pray do not make so many pretty speeches to me, both of you," answered Mrs. Leigh. "I am quite overpowered."

"You deserve it all, dear mother. I always tell everyone, when they praise me for anything, mamma taught me," said Lillian.

"Dear child, you're so very modest."

"What do you think of the little horrors upstairs, grandmamma?" asked Leonard.

"Horrors, indeed! If you mean the dear children, I think they are beautiful, and so good."

"Pretty well, considering ; but what are we to do with two boys ?"

"There's time enough to think, that's one comfort, Leonard."

"Yes, certainly, there is ; but it's a serious consideration. They're expensive investments, boys. Girls, now, marry, and get out of one's way."

"Oh, not always. I know a gentleman who has seven daughters, all unmarried," said Mr. Leigh.

"Gracious, they should go out to a colony."

"Yes, we have often laughed at them, and said they ought ; but they are immensely happy and jolly as they are, and seem not in the least to regret their single blessedness. But, really, my dear boy, we must not linger too long over our dinner, or we shall be benighted."

"Look here, Lilly dear," said Leonard ; "I have had very little walking to-day. Let us go with the parents part of the way. It's a lovely evening."

And so it was arranged ; and the ladies, leaving the dining-room, went up to put on their things.

Just as they were coming down again, a loud knock at the door startled them.

"Who can that be at this time of night ?" said

Lillian, stepping back to the nursery to send Rachel to open the door. "Peep, mamma dear."

"Oh, my child, I don't know; a gentleman, very tall, and in a uniform, I think."

"Can't be, mamma dear. We don't know a soldier or a sailor."

Rachel returned, and said it was a gentleman wanted missis, but would not give his name.

"Mamma dear, come with me," said Lillian, as, with some trepidation, she took her way to the drawing-room, followed by her mother. The gentleman turned as they entered; and, as a smile stole over his face, old memories of long ago came back to Lillian, and, with a cry of joy, she flew into his arms.

CHAPTER XII.

AND LAST.

THE knock at the door and subsequent excitement in the drawing-room, related in the last chapter, brought out Leonard from the dining-room to discover what had occasioned it, and it must be acknowledged that he was somewhat startled at the sight that presented itself; but his equanimity was quickly restored by Lillian saying, as soon as she could recover her breath, "Leonard dear, don't you know it's Frank—dear old Frank?"

"I certainly did not know," said Leonard, "for he was very unlike the gentleman before me the last time I saw him. But I'm glad to see him, and glad to have proof of the truth of Lilly's statement," he said, laughing, and pointing to Mrs. Leigh, who, with tears of joy coursing down her face, was now kissing her son most energetically.

Lillian had run off to the dining-room, and returned with her father, so that it was some time

before quietude was restored, and Frank could sit down and relate his adventures. He said that the last letters he had received had told him of Helen's marriage, and that was the last home news he had had; and that he thought the best thing to do on landing was to come straight to Lillian's, who would enlighten him about the rest of the family. It was a great piece of luck, he thought, finding his mother and father there, and he would now go home with them. "But he had no intention of going directly," he said, "so dear mother must just take her things off, and sit down comfortably, and he would have a cab, or fly, or something or other, and take them home all the way comfortably, by and by."

This was readily granted, too glad to see him to refuse him anything; and Lillian, having discovered he had had no dinner, soon arranged to have some put in the dining-room, with tea for those who had dined, so that they could all assemble round the table once more; and a merrier or happier party had seldom sat down to any meal. Of course Frank had heaps of tales to tell, and much of domestic news to hear, and they laughed and talked till Mrs. Leigh began to say they really must go home. But Frank would go up to the nursery to see the babies, and then come back twenty times to kiss Lillian, and tell

her she must get him a little wife just like herself, that they were some time getting off, and, by the time they reached Old Court, it was so late that they found poor Bridget in a dreadful state of alarm ; but she was immediately consoled by the sight of Master Frank, who had always been a great pet of hers, and whose excellences she further extolled when, on the following morning, he presented her with a little present from China.

“ To think,” she said, “ of the dear boy remembering the old woman, and bringing her something from such miles and miles away. God bless him ! But it was just like him, that it was.” Wonderfully was it treasured and shown to every one ; and when, years after, Bridget was carried to her last resting-place on earth, amongst her things was the little gift found, wrapped in white paper, and written on—

“ Given me by my dear Master Frank. I should like, at my death, for Miss Emily to have it.”

Emily was the next, in her estimation, to Frank ; and so, of course, the last request was granted, and to Emily was given the piece of Chinese work which had so gratified the poor old faithful servant.

Lillian was some time recovering from the excitement of her brother's unexpected arrival, and was continually talking of him and his changed

appearance to Leonard ; and, of course, could not resist building her castles in the air respecting his future, "How nice it would be if he would marry Beatrice De Courcy ! Really that would be charming, for I like the poor girl so much."

"My dear girl," said Leonard, "you would then be positively connected with the object of your greatest aversion."

"No, no, come, Leonard ; not so strong as that. I certainly do not like her, but I honestly own my greatest fear was that you would contrast her with me, to my disadvantage."

"I said you were jealous," said Leonard, laughing.

"Ah, but I was not. I could not think so ill of you as to be jealous," replied Lillian ; "I only feared that you might regret being bound to one so inferior to what seemed to be your model of perfection ; but I never doubted, Leonard, you would keep your faith to her to whom fate had bound you."

"Lilly, darling, as I told you when I first saw her, she was like a diamond beside a pure and spotless pearl ; let the diamonds sparkle for whom they will, but give me my matchless pearl."

"Dear Leonard, I am quite satisfied," said Lillian ; "and I really should like Frank to have

such a beautiful wife as Beatrice, she is growing into such a nice sensible girl, too, under Mrs. Gresham's care. I have a great mind to ask her to spend the day here, and get Frank to meet her."

"What inveterate matchmakers you women are. I would do nothing of the sort if I were you."

"Oh, it would be such fun, Leonard dear; do let me?"

"What is fun to you might be death to them. I think it much better not. I should like to know that poor Beatrice was happily married, but, to tell you the truth, Lilly, I wish to drop them quietly; the name of De Courcy has now an unpleasant sound to me. When I remember how nearly my domestic happiness was risked, I would like to forget the existence of one who might have been the cause."

"Dear husband, I have long ago forgotten that—I was foolish," said Lilly, coming to him and laying her hand on his shoulder.

"I shall never forget it, darling," he said, kissing the face bent down to his; "and so, as I said before, I should rather have nothing more to do with the De Courcys."

It was after dinner that this conversation took place, in the little room which Lillian had so care-

fully arranged for her husband in their early married days, and which Leonard liked, in consequence, better than any room in the house. A knock at the door disturbed their conversation, and Lillian ran up to the nursery whilst Rachel answered it. It was a message from Miss Simmonds to say she was very ill, and that, if not too much trouble, she should like to see Mrs. Gray.

Lillian lost no time, but was with her almost as soon as the messenger got back. She had thought for some time that her old friend was failing, and therefore was not surprised, though much distressed, to get the message. She found the old lady in bed, with the woman of the house in attendance on her; she held out her hand to Lillian, as a smile of inexpressible pleasure lighted her face. But the tears rose to Lillian's eyes as she saw the alteration in the dear old lady, and felt too surely that the summons had come for her to go to that rest from her labours to which she herself looked forward so joyfully. Telling the woman she would stay with Miss Simmonds for a little while, Lillian took her seat beside her, and asked her gently and tenderly if she suffered, and how long she had felt so very ill.

"Only to-day, my dear," she answered so feebly

that Lillian could scarcely hear what she said; "but the oil has been slowly failing for some time. I know that I am going home, love," she said, and again a smile lighted all her face, "home for the holidays."

"Dear Miss Simmonds," said Lillian, pressing her hand, "how I shall miss you!"

"You will come, dear, by and by, when your work is done; good mother and true wife, you shall rest and be rewarded in a better life 'to come.'"

"I hope I shall deserve it, dear friend."

"We cannot 'deserve' love, only do our best, and believe in boundless mercy. How poor our best is, though, and how great the mercy which accepts it! I should like to lie in the cemetery," she said, after a short pause, during which she had held Lillian's hand in hers, occasionally carrying it to her lips, "and you will see my last earthly resting-place sometimes. I have sent for my good friend, if he does not come before I go, tell him all about it—tell him," she said, with an effort raising herself on her pillow, "that I was glad to go, full of hope, and joy, and peace, and that I blest him with my dying breath, and prayed that we might both meet again in the better land."

"I will, dear, I will; but I must hope a little

longer that you will stay with us. You will feel stronger, perhaps, to-morrow," said Lillian, trying in vain to suppress her tears.

"No, do not hope that; at fourscore 'the grasshopper becomes a burden,' and the glorious promised rest so precious to look forward to."

"But I shall lose such a counsellor; you have been such a comfort to me."

"I am glad, my child, very glad, and you will find another, if you need it, depend on it; but let your husband be your chief counsellor, place all your confidence in him, believe in him, and trust him always. There is no shadow between you now."

"No, none, dear, all is brightness and content now. But I must speak of yourself, dear; to-night you must not be alone, who is going to stay with you?"

"No one, love; Mrs. Stacey sleeps in the next room, I can call her."

"No, no, that will not do; I would come myself but for the baby; I will send some one to be with you."

"It is not necessary, I want nothing but a little drink, I think."

"You shall have something nice to drink, dear,

and some one to watch you, it will make me happier. I will go and speak to Mrs. Stacey ;” and Lillian went out of the room, and called Mrs. Stacey to her, telling her how greatly she thought Miss Simmonds was altered, and that she must not be left.

Somewhat crossly, Mrs. Stacey said she could not really undertake to sit up with her, her health would not permit it, as she had so much work in the day ; she must have her rest.

Lillian assured her she did not require her to do so, she would provide some one, but she must have an arm-chair in the room, and all requirements for making tea both for nurse and patient. She would get a night-lamp to keep the water hot herself, if Mrs. Stacey would just attend to her whilst she went home to get the things, and find some one to sit up ; and running quickly home she sent Rachel to fetch Esther’s mother, whilst she got several things together she thought might be necessary, and made the drink for the night.

It was a kind of barley water, and not the gruelly preparation known by that name, but made after a receipt which had been given to Lillian’s mother. The barley was first washed several times in cold water, and then boiling water was

poured on it, with a few lumps of white sugar, saturated with lemon juice; a little rind thinly peeled was thrown in, and the jug covered over till the infusion was cold. It was then strained off into a decanter, and a little sherry added if required, or thought agreeable. Lillian made this concoction with the greatest care, and asking Leonard if he would mind staying up for her, she said she would go back to her dear old friend for two or three hours, and then, if there was no decided change for the worse, come home. Seeing him comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair, with an amusing book, having willingly acceded to her request, she returned to Ivy Cottage, and remained there till about twelve o'clock, and then, as her patient seemed in a peaceful sleep, she returned home, and was as surprised as pleased to hear in the morning that she was better. But a few days passed, and then another change took place. Lillian was sent for hurriedly, and with one hand in hers, and the other in that of the friend who had been such a true one to her, one of God's beloved slept His sleep.

Her loss was deeply felt by Lillian. She had not made many friends in her married life; her home had occupied her so much, she had had but

little time to give to others ; but Miss Simmonds had been so dear and wise a friend, that she had grown to love her, and felt her necessary to her happiness. Her death was therefore a great blank, and seemed to Lillian an irreparable loss, which could never be supplied. Leonard, too, regretted her deeply ; he had liked so to feel, in his compulsory absences, that she was there to comfort and console his little wife ; and she had said that while he had been to Brighton, she had spent all her spare time with Miss Simmonds. But she was gone now, and on his next visit poor Lillian's eyes were very watery, doubly missing him without her to fly to, whose cheerful wisdom had driven away gloom and despondency, and made things seem bright and right when she had felt that nothing could be bright or pleasant until Leonard came home again. It is a great art, the art of putting things in a pleasant light, and one which this dear old lady had eminently possessed ; and as Lilly kissed Leonard before his departure, she said —

“ Oh, Leonard ! I shall not hear that dear, cheerful voice telling me how right it is for you to go, and saying all sorts of nice, pleasant things, till I begin to think them myself.”

“ No, my darling ; but do honour to her

memory by being the wise little woman she would have had you."

"I will try; but oh, the loneliness of the house without you. But go, darling, I shall make you lose the train with my folly;" and with another long kiss, she let him go, and tried to remember what her old friend had so often said to her, and thought that perhaps from her bright home above she was looking down approvingly on the little friend who so gratefully treasured her memory.

Leonard was to return on the evening of the following day, and Lilly, in the morning, after her household duties were over, and she had eaten her apology for a dinner (Leonard was to have supper on his return), was wondering how she should get through the rest of the day, when a brougham drawing up to the door astonished her. It was a mistake, however. She was sure people often did ring her bell by mistake; but no, this time it was not, for opening the door of the carriage himself, Mr. Broughton stepped out, and handed out a lady, tall and young by her figure, but so closely veiled, that Lillian could not see her face. She saw them from the nursery window; her baby was in her arms, and she came out on the landing to meet Rachel.

"I've showed 'em in the drawing-room, and I'm to give you this," said Rachel—a card, on which was written, "Mr. and Mrs. Broughton."

"Mr. and Mrs. Broughton," echoed Lillian; "what does this mean? I think I can guess though; and putting the baby into Rachel's arms, she went wonderingly downstairs, prepared in the veiled figure to see Mrs. De Courcy; but she could scarcely believe her senses when, on entering the room, she was suddenly seized and violently embraced, and a young fresh voice said, in tones quite unlike Mrs. De Courcy's studied ones—

"It's me, Mrs. Gray. Only think, really poor little once miserable me, now the happiest of the happy."

"Beatrice!" exclaimed Lillian, holding her at arm's length, and surveying with admiration the exquisitely beautiful face, tenfold more beautiful, radiant with joy, "is it possible?"

"It is, indeed," said Mr. Broughton, advancing, and holding out his hand to Lillian. "We have seen so much of each other lately, Mrs. Gray, we found we could not live apart. Beatrice thought she could put up with me better than going home, and I thought home would not be home without her, so with good Mrs. Gresham's assistance we

got married, and we have come to pay our first call on you. I would not let Beatrice write or send you cards, I thought it would be so much better fun to take you by surprise and astonish you."

"You have succeeded beyond a doubt," said Lillian; "I am astonished."

"I knew you would be, dear Mrs. Gray," said Beatrice; "but now I want to repay you, if I can, for all your kindness to me. My husband," she said, looking at him with a smile, "spoils me so dreadfully, that he lets me do just what I please; and I want you and your husband and babies to come and stay with me. Mr. Gray can go to business just as well from us, and it will do the babies and you good. Now, say you'll come."

"I cannot say to-day, dear, for my husband is away, but I will ask him when he comes home to-night."

"Do, and let me know directly; but you must come."

Lillian smiled, as she answered, "Then I had better say yes at once."

"Decidedly; let me see, this is Wednesday, then I shall expect you on Saturday."

"But not the children," said Lillian.

"Of course the children; why, you know they are my delight."

"Well, I will drop you a line the moment I have seen Leonard; you know," she said, blushing slightly as she spoke, "I keep no nurse, and I fear the children may be a trouble."

"They can never be a trouble to me," said Beatrice. "I shall so like to help you with them, if you will let me."

"You are very kind. I will come, indeed, if Leonard can manage it."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Gray; tell your good husband he really must manage it—it will please my little darling here," said Mr. Broughton; "and though of course I cannot expect him to think that of the same importance that I do, still I believe he will do it for my sake."

Lillian said she was sure he would do much to please Mr. Broughton; and, after a little more conversation, and Beatrice had admired and kissed the babies, whom she begged to see, they departed. Lillian longed to know how Mrs. De Courcy had taken the marriage, but, as they did not name her, she did not like to do so. On Leonard's return she was delighted to have such news to tell him. He was astonished beyond measure, saying he had

never dreamed of such a thing, and readily consented to the visit, as he was curious to see Mr. Broughton in the character of a devoted bridegroom; and on the following Saturday, therefore, she started with the babies for Blackheath. Beatrice flew out to meet them, carrying the children in her arms herself, and conveying them to a delightful room which she had had prepared for them, opening into Lillian's, where the neatest of little maids was waiting to receive them.

"Now, dear Mrs. Gray," said Beatrice, "I have given this little body up to you entirely; while you are here she is your maid, to do what you require for yourself and babies, so make any use of her, and don't fatigue yourself. We dine at seven, and, until then, I shall leave you alone. You can get the pets into bed, and Alice will sit beside them; send her for anything you want."

Certainly Lillian found herself in clover—a delightful bed-room and dressing-room, a charming nursery opening into it for her children, and a neat, clean, cheerful-looking girl to wait upon them. What a rest and comfort for her! And when, at half-past six, Leonard arrived with Mr. Broughton from the City, she rushed to him and said she was so happy, the darlings were both asleep so com-

fortably, and that kind, thoughtful Beatrice had got such a nice girl to wait on them, who had told her that she had a cruel mother, who beat her, and that Miss De Courcy, as she was then, had told her to be a good girl and try to bear it, and she would make her happy some day ; and that she had kept her word well, the little maid said, for she was quite, quite happy now.

" And so *you* look, little woman," said Leonard, kissing her.

" I am, dear, what the schoolboys call ' jolly,' " said Lillian, laughing, " and I believe it will do us all good."

After dinner, Leonard could resist no longer the desire to know what Mrs. De Courcy thought of the marriage, and so asked Mr. Broughton if he had seen Mrs. De Courcy lately.

" Oh no," he said, laughing ; " ' mamma' is very indignant with both of us. To tell you the honest truth, Gray, I believe she meant to marry me herself, but I did not see it. I never dreamt of marrying at all, but somehow Beatrice's loving eyes were too much for me—she flattered me with her evident partiality. There is no fool like an old fool, you know ; and one day, when I went to see her, I found her crying because she had got to go home, and so I said she had better come home to

me, which she seemed to like ever so much better ; and so we only consulted Mrs. Gresham, and she arranged all for us—bridesmaids and all—and we started for the Isle of Wight, where we wrote to ‘mamma.’ It was immense fun, but mamma did not think so. We did have a letter about our ingratitude, etc., etc. However, it amused her, and did not hurt us, as the man said, and so we have outlived it, and we are as happy as we can be. Poor woman,” he continued, more seriously, “I am very sorry for her. I have known her a great many years, and tried to serve her, but she is one of those people whom nobody can help ; she was an only child, and fearfully indulged, and her life has been a miserable purposeless one, frittered away in idleness and folly. Mrs. Gresham has saved my dear girl, or she would have been just such another.”

“She is very charming now,” said Leonard.

“Yes, bless her, I am highly honoured. Some young men will envy me, but you have no occasion to do so.”

Leonard bowed and smiled, and the conversation fell into other channels—Mr. Broughton kindly asking how he was getting on, and telling him one day he should want him to build him a country house, for Beatrice cared nothing about a London life, and he should retire with her to some country

nook as soon as he could see his way to build such a house as he should like. Whilst the gentlemen were thus talking over their wine, Lillian was chatting with Beatrice in her luxurious bed-room—wonderful contrast to the little room in her old home. She had learnt to take a pride in neatness at good Mrs. Gresham's, and now, adorned with beautiful furniture, a queen might have slept in Beatrice's bed-room. She was very happy; she had no thought but to pay with love and devotion the debt of gratitude she owed to Mr. Broughton. And long was this pleasant visit remembered by Lillian, and thought of over and over again when she returned to her own little home.

She had not been home long when the news came that Miss Hepburn, after a short illness, had died, and Lillian watched the post with painful anxiety, still unable to divest herself of the idea that the property would be left to her. Her love of castle-building again evinced itself—she pictured the comfort of the pretty home, the lovely garden for the children, the rooms which should serve them for nurseries, the nice house she should then be able to keep, for, bright and cheerful as she was, there were times when the constant work and thought she had to exercise—the everlasting consideration of the most profitable way to lay out

every farthing—the anxiety that the expenses should in any way exceed the income—was somewhat wearying. But she waited in vain; and it must be owned that her eyes were somewhat watery, and her voice unsteady, when she handed her mother's letter to Leonard, in which it was stated that Miss Hepburn had left the whole of her property to a distant relative!

"Yes," said Leonard, "it makes good the words of an old friend of my father's who used to say, 'a man may say what he likes in his life time, child, but when he dies he leaves his property to his relatives.' I am sorry you are disappointed, darling, but I expected nothing else; and I wonder what could make you do so."

"I don't know," said Lillian. "I own I have been silly, but somehow I fancied it was the way out of all our troubles, at least, I don't mean troubles, but anxieties, you know."

"My dear little woman, it's only in novels people jump at once into ease and competence. No, no, darling—make up your mind to it, we must toil, and slave, and save, for many more years yet, perhaps never cease till our youngsters are big enough to slave for us. You don't wish for an easy life without me, my wife, do you?"

"Leonard, don't ask such silly questions.

was foolish, and shall quickly forget my folly and go to work again, like a brave little woman."

And so she did; and though six years after marriage five little children claimed her care, she was the same bright, cheerful, hopeful little woman that she had been from the beginning; the words, "good mother, true wife, you shall rest and be rewarded in the better life to come," often cheered her, and she was a good mother and true wife.

Leonard, though he was not making a fortune, was getting on comfortably; his good mother had gone to her rest, and left him a little money and the house she lived in, which made a satisfactory increase to his income, sufficient to enable him to give Lillian two servants (so Anna Maria was duly installed), and also to indulge in a larger house. Lillian was, therefore, more comfortable in many ways, though with such a family her cares had not decreased.

The two eldest boys were sent to a grammar-school near, but the others she taught herself—they were girls the other three, greatly to her delight; and as they grew older, she added to their education what she had proved herself so efficient in—housekeeping. The little things were early made to take turns to attend to the stores kept, and receiving a penny a week as a reward, with a

prize occasionally for any extra attention; and as they grew older they had days for cooking in which they made pies, puddings, and cakes, and it was an emulation amongst them to see who could make the best things with the smallest means.

Each girl, too, had her appointed duty in the house. One saw to the linen, another to the care of the ornaments, and plate and glass, arrangements of flowers, etc., and the third to the weekly accounts; superintended by their gentle loving mother, who, lenient to their mistakes, still encouraged them to persevere, and so drilled them, that her house was as well and tastefully arranged, and her table as well laid out and supplied, as many who had double their income.

Poor old Uncle Pritchard, to the surprise of all, lived on, and still spent his Sundays with his nephew; and strange to say, the children doated on him, and as they grew up and the house echoed with their young merry voices, smiles, rare visitants to his face of late years, came back to their old quarters, and he would ask if he might come on week days, that he might hear them sing and play, for Lillian encouraged in them all a love of music, so that it was quite a pleasant family concert, the fair sweet mother still the star amongst them all, at least in her loving husband's eyes.

Helen, though very happy, remained very delicate, and with only one very sickly, and proportionably idolized, boy. Emily was the old maid of the family, but useful and loveable, as so many of such maiden aunts are, that surely the world could not go on so well without them. Sailor Frank goes to and fro to sea, and has found a wife, but not like Lillian, in Leonard's opinion.

Round a Christmas fire let us take our leave of all. We shall find a large party at Old Court. Mr. and Mrs. Leigh have asked them all to assemble once more beneath the old roof-tree. There is Harry and his wife and four children; Lillian and Leonard with their three girls and one boy, the other is away; through Mr. Broughton's kind exertions, he has a first-rate situation and cannot leave, nor does he think it prudent, for it is a long distance, so some shiny drops have fallen that morning on his loving letter to his mother, wishing her all good at that holy season, and saying how he shall think of them all. Then there is Helen with her pale son, who is reading for orders, but who looks unfit for any profession, poor fellow; and moving about amongst them, with love and satisfaction beaming in her face, gentle aunt Emily; and in the corner in an arm-chair, especially devoted to him, Uncle Pritchard

sits, very deaf, but smiling on all around with a happy consciousness that they are happy, and that they are glad to have him amongst them. After dinner, when the cloth is drawn, Mr. Leigh takes a letter from his pocket, which he asks him to read aloud. It is as follows :—

“DEAREST MOTHER,—God bless you ; it will be Christmas-time when this reaches you, may it find you altogether enjoying it and thinking with some love and good wishes of your sailor boy—boy, I say, why I’m getting an old man, positively grey ! I hope I shall be home again before long. I have sad letters from my little woman. I hope she will be with her family enjoying Christmas as well as she can without me, and reading a letter from me which she will receive with this. Oh dear, sailors ought not to marry ; but never mind, some day I’ll drop anchor in old England and have a jolly time amongst you all, please God. Kiss them all round for me.”

“Now,” said Mr. Leigh, “I cannot promise to do that, but we will drink his health, with that of all the absent whom we love.”

The toast was warmly responded to, and then Mr. Leigh continued—

"It is a great happiness to me and my dear wife to see you all here to-day; it is unlikely such a treat can ever be in store for us again in this world. It is wonderful now to see those great girls and boys, and call them grandchildren; we little thought when first we welcomed them in this world we should be permitted to see them thus far on their pilgrimage through it; we are grateful for the privilege, and our prayer is that we may see you all in a bright future. What can I say, or in what words can I better express what I feel, than in those of the little lame boy immortalized by a great writer—'God bless us ~~all~~ ^{every one}'"

And, what better can I say? How better end this tale, or, more truly this simple annal of everyday life? Without that blessing, no home can prosper; no efforts be crowned with success. May it go with the newly-married in their first start in life, giving them courage and confidence; resting on the young cherished heads that may gather round them, sanctifying their love, strengthening their hopes, and encouraging the faith which trusts in a Higher love and a Better life.

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